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THE CHRIST FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN

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A STUDY OF THE GOSPEL BY ST. JOHN

BY THE

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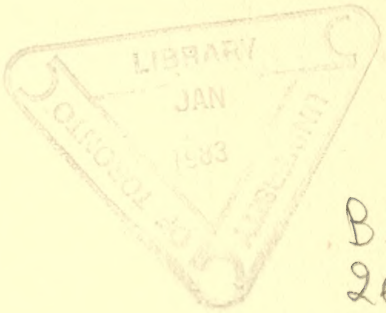

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object of this book is to show how the various impressions made by successive sections of John's Gospel coalesce at last into one unified impression—are, as it were, various roads to a common centre for the traveller who is willing to be led.

The tone passes often into one of persuasion and appeal. There needs no apology for this; for John himself had a purpose of appeal in every word he wrote. And an intellectual examination of the Gospel—if properly carried out—must lead to a spiritual decision either for or against the spiritual claim it makes.

WOKING, *March* 1904.

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THE CHRIST FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN

I.

THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE GOSPEL.

IF John's Gospel is to be rightly understood, and the success rightly estimated with which it achieves the object behind the writing, the reader must, so far as possible, set himself at John's point of view, and must judge the Gospel by the standard to which the evangelist himself worked. How far the book goes in the direction of proving its author's case can only be determined by a student who, through all his attentive reading, preserves within him a true memory of the proposition which is to stand or fall. Exact

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comprehension of, and close grasp upon, the doctrine in John's mind, are indispensable to us if we are going to test the degree in which John's argument carries weight; and the writer would be entitled to complain of unfair dealing on our part, did we either praise his work as sustaining a theory he never meant it to prove, or condemn it as insufficient to bear a conclusion he did not intend it to support. The test we apply to the Gospel's facts and suggestions must, if it is to have value, be identical with John's own.

Towards the end of his Gospel John gives a definite statement of the purpose which has been his guiding star. "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." Yet it is possible to read even an announcement so clear as this without fully appreciating its content, and without, therefore, being able to put it to its right use as the touch-stone of the whole book's success. It is not a fair —or at any rate not an exhaustive—paraphrase of the statement to say that John's Gospel is written

in defence of the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, and in order that certain results may follow in our experience upon an intellectual acceptance of it: each outstanding point of the sentence carries a significance beyond that which first appears; and we must interpret the words "believe," "Son of God," "have life in his name," as John interpreted them—or at least be receptive to the fact that John employed these words with a meaning over and above their first simplicity—before we can even understand what the writer would be at.

Yet it is of course equally true to say that the full significance of the declaration can only be apprehended after the Gospel has been read; and the fact that the evangelist places this succinct summary of the intentions which have swayed him practically at the close, rather than at the beginning, of his work seems to indicate that he himself viewed the matter so. The Gospel needs to be studied in the light of this declaration, and yet the declaration can be fully apprehended only in the Gospel's light—how are we to escape from the circle to which we thus appear condemned?

This much, it may be said in reply, we can

gather at once from John's brief concluding explanation of what his aims have been, and this much we may take back with us to the reading of his book (leaving the complete understanding of his final summary to dawn upon us when it will) as a lamp which will go far to light us through page after page. If we give due weight to the final clause of the evangelist's summarising statement —"and that believing ye may have life in his name"—the inference emerges that in the divineness of Jesus John held a new force (not merely a new *revelation*, but a new *force*, in the strict and scientifically limited meaning of the term) to have thrown itself among the forces acting upon the experience of men. On those who believe—whatever the precise attitude of mind and heart indicated by that word may be—the divine life in Jesus works in such wise as to communicate itself to them. Christ possessed a life which was able to repeat itself—a life which could generate life—in those who gave it opportunity and room; and this creativeness, being the prerogative of God, shows Christ to have been God's Son. That is John's case. His aim is to

demonstrate that in this Jesus of whom he writes there dwells an active, energising power such as has never visited the world before: it is not merely the appearance of a self-contained supernatural phenomenon that he speaks of: he would bring his readers, not only to acknowledge the presence of something marvellous *in* this Jesus, but the emergence of something marvellous *from* Him, operating upon human experience to touch it to issues not hitherto included in its range; and in his Gospel John advances no speculative theory accompanied by reasonings which, it is hoped, will tend to demonstrate its truth, but seeks, from the manifestations of indwelling power which the history of Jesus affords, to lead students of the history to yield themselves to that power in their turn. "Here is a new force revealed—will you not open your hearts that it may do there the work my pages show it as being able to do?"

John, in brief, is not so much the philosopher (despite the admitted fact that his Gospel is in its fundamental idea philosophic above the rest) as he is the discoverer and announcer of a new force which in the earthly years of Jesus alighted

in the midst of men. He adopts, and wishes his readers to adopt, the inductive method. Here is a power operating in this way, and in this, and in this—what is the doctrine about it which combines the distinctive and essential features of all the results it brings to pass? By what name shall this force be clearly marked off from all the other forces we know? Jesus, not simply as divine in Himself, but as the divine life communicating itself to the common life of man, the divine life thrusting itself upon human experience and human hearts to transform them—that is the conception to which this writer desires his readers to attain when their reading is done. And the question which the student of to-day must propound to himself as he passes into John's company is this, "What manner of force can that be which, working upon the material presented to it by man himself and by the world in which man lived, produced effects such as those here set down?" For that is the question to which John offers a reply.

The distinction between Jesus as divine in Himself, and Jesus as divineness acting upon, communicating itself to, human character till

human character is in measure tuned to divine pitch, transfused with the divineness which acts upon it, is a distinction entirely essential to a comprehension of John's Gospel—entirely essential, indeed, it is not too much to say, to any Christian experience that is to be in any wise profound. Certainly it was not John's intention simply to add to the sum of human knowledge a knowledge of the fact that something surpassingly wonderful had flashed across the horizon of human view. And, in fact, it needs scarce any consideration to perceive that if this were all that is to be said about the divineness of Christ, a recognition of it would leave the essential problem of human character much what it was before. This Jesus may have said certain things and done certain things which show Him to have had His origin outside our earth: the sources whence spring the average types of human life—even the sources whence the grand and heroic types of human life emerge —may be admittedly insufficient to produce such a life as this; but the mere appearance of a life isolated, in its divine origination, from the ordinary

lives of men leaves those ordinary lives to climb and raise themselves as they did before. A supernatural *revelation* which is nothing more would have the dynamic quality only in very small degree. Men might be encouraged by the spoken word, drawn by the revealed ideal; but the old problems would face them still. Not until the divineness in Jesus is viewed as actually *creative* — as entering into, reproducing itself within, those who are willing to admit it, does even a divine Jesus change for us the problem of character and the method by which it is to be solved. To employ and submit to a force is a different thing from being stirred by a miracle or kindled by new ideas. Christ as divine in Himself is but a miracle on which through the ages human eyes look back with wonder: Christ as a creative divine life, as a divine force which for the first time sets itself at the disposal of men in their spiritual strife, changes, wholly and hopefully, the spiritual programme and the spiritual prospect of men. And it is to the point of conceiving and receiving Him so that John would have his readers be led.

We shall be prepared, if this be understood, to find John's purpose influencing the character of his argument, and giving a particular tone and colour to all the process of his thought and word. The presence of an active force is not proved through logical syllogisms: it is nothing to the point to say that this Gospel affords no reasoned demonstration—starting from universally accepted premises, and reaching at last to a conclusion irresistible by the mind—of the divineness of Jesus Christ: John's business is not the logical unfolding of what certain admitted general principles contain. The complaint that such an unfolding is not provided is really what lies behind many refusals, made confessedly on philosophic grounds, to recognise Christ as "the Son of God." But purely logical demonstration can find no place in this field. It is not by pure logic that men are brought to believe in the presence and activity of force. A force proves its presence by producing its appropriate effects; and the only exercise the mind can have to perform in such matters as these is to reason back from the character of the effects to the

character of the force behind them. We perceive certain things, and conclude that electricity is at work: we feel certain things, and they amply demonstrate to us that heat is there: in some fashion results announce themselves, and we know what cause is passing by: we start, in fact, not with *a priori* reasonings, but with that which the eye can see and the hands can handle; and the purely logical faculty, working as it does in the abstract realms, could never establish the actual existence of a concrete and energising force. In this field, the effect *is* the premiss. Of course, reason may go on to show how, within a universe ordered in all things and sure, such a power as that whose presence we have been led to suspect may well find a home. How the working of such a power is entirely in harmony with a philosophically satisfactory and complete scheme of things may be made clear, to the further confirming of a new-born faith. But this is not included in John's plan, although the prologue to his Gospel gives sufficient token that on this point, also, his conviction was firm. The first and primary operation of the mind, as some

power strikes into its field of vision, is to gather the nature of the power at work from the nature of the seen results. To demonstrate that the power is there, the demonstrator must bid his hearers attend to what the power has wrought: the hearers' minds, then, must take or refuse the last step. John's whole dealing with his readers is the definite recording of definite things accomplished by the force which dwelt in Jesus Christ. His pages can only carry, not syllogisms and arguments and logical proofs piled high until the mind is compelled to say "Amen," but concrete signs which indicate that out of this Christ *some* power was reaching forth to touch the world. And from the consideration of these signs, from the uniform character which amid all their variety they bore, from the unique impress stamped upon every one, John hoped that those who read would be brought to call this Christ-force the very creative life of God.

It is in the same line of things to say that the final certainty of Christ's divineness is attained by the way of experience. If Christ's divineness

means, as we have seen that for John it did mean, not only that Christ was from above, but that the force of divine creativeness was in Him, it cannot be otherwise than by experience that the supreme demonstration of His divineness comes home. With forces it is always so. The material forces of the world are proved for us by our experience of them in the particular sense to which they make their appeal. This divine creativeness of Christ is proved for us when through the whole range of life (since the appeal of such a force can have no narrower object than that) it has done its creative work. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact—though by those who do not grasp the essentials of the problem it be made a reproach—that we hold Christ to be the Son of God because we have experienced Him to be so. To base our conviction upon the foundation of experience is in no wise to be carried away by a shallow emotionalism, and is, in very deed, an indication of the perfect sanity of our faith. Our belief in the divineness of Jesus Christ ranks thus with our belief in all other forces that sweep the world·

The sense that Christ's divine creativeness has touched us is the last confirmation of the belief that He is divine. And John's presentation of effects which this force has wrought can only be the preface to an experience wherein it repeats all the wonders of old. He can but show us what the power has performed in order that his doctrine concerning its nature may have its greatest vindication for us when we submit to its sway.

It is for a cumulative process of thought and suggestion that we must look. It is not from a first manifestation of energising power, nor from a second or a third—but from the combined testimony of the three — that we arrive at certainty as to the force which has produced them all. What John undertakes is a survey of a certain field of history—a field broad enough, and on a scale amply large, to permit of a safe generalisation as to what lay back of the recorded events. And the mind must wait for the development, patient while the separate threads weave themselves into one firm strand, allowing time for the impression to grow. It must be driven

to its definition of this power at last by the impossibility of finding any other definition that gives consistency to the manifested results. Here is no sudden elevation to the summit of a firm and convinced belief. Here is rather a long climb up a gradual slope—the climber turning at the end, to be surprised at the altitude he has reached. And not only is it a cumulative argument for which we are to be prepared—an argument whose strength lies in the combination of all its elements, and whose full strength, therefore, is not to be appreciated till all the elements are given—but even for some records whose relevance to the main purpose of the writer is not immediately clear. These, too, will obtain and reveal their significance when the process is complete. If some of the incidents standing on the page seem to strike notes that contribute little or nothing to the music which this evangelist wants to make us hear, we shall find at length that all is harmony after all.

So we turn to the things that are written, that we may see what force has worked itself into the effects these pages record.

II.

CHRIST SEEN AS FULFILLING THE ETERNAL INTENTION: THE WORD MADE FLESH.

JOHN i. 1–18.

OF the four Gospels, John's is the only one which sets out with a theory to be supported by the narrative to come. The other evangelists recapitulate the facts of Christ's life, or a portion of them, simply—one might say—from the historian's point of view: one by one the incidents are detailed, the discourses reported, each incident and each discourse being taken as practically an isolated thing; and while it is of course impossible to tell the story of Christ without suggesting certain doctrines and inferences, the writers leave it at that, allowing the doctrines to emerge out of the story as they

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may, not at all arranging the story to support the doctrines. With John's Gospel the case stands differently altogether. His doctrine, his theory, is clear in his mind before his pen begins to move. He possesses, indeed, more even than what would be commonly understood by a doctrine about Christ: he possesses what one might term a whole system of philosophy whereof Christ is the culminating point and wherein Christ is the supreme figure; and this prologue to his Gospel, as contained in the first eighteen verses, indicates what it is. In these verses he sets forth the theory about Christ which his future writing is to illustrate: they form the text, as it were, of which the following Gospel is the expanded discourse. Towards the end of the book, when nearly all the tale has been told, John sums up again, in briefer form, the thesis to which he has devoted his labour; and, as we have seen, this is the summary he then constructs, "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing

ye may have life in his name." He has been selecting, that is to say, those "signs" of word and deed on the part of Jesus which went specially to uphold the doctrine that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," and which would lead men to submit themselves to the divine life in Him; and other signs, numerous and essentially arresting as they might be, which did not so directly tend to that, he has passed by. His Gospel has been written with the set purpose of throwing the divineness of Christ—in the full sense our previous chapter set upon the phrase—and His relation as Son to God the Father, into bold relief before the reader's eye. With careful discrimination John has chosen out the incidents in the life of Jesus which, as the reader apprehends them, will repeatedly constrain him to say, "Here is the divineness in this Jesus revealing itself once more. This Jesus must be the Christ, the Son of God."

This prologue contains in fuller—one might say, in more philosophical—form, the doctrine about Christ which John sets into briefer expression at his Gospel's close. "I am going to write"

(so we may paraphrase it) "of One who is the Word of God." Word, speech, is of course the most direct and immediate revelation of him who employs it, springing straight out of what, at the moment of the speaking, the speaker is: speech is our quickest, readiest, surest method of expressing ourselves when the necessity for self-expression arises. There is nothing that can come between us and the word whereby we reveal what we are. Outside circumstances, unless of course superior physical force silences us altogether, have no influence that can spoil or interfere with the connection between that which is in us and the utterance in which it is embodied. It is in our word that the inmost nature of us comes to its birth for the world beyond. So Christ is the direct, immediate method by which God utters Himself. God puts Himself into Christ as we put ourselves into speech. What is in Christ springs straight out of what is in God, as the speaker's word springs straight out of what the speaker is. He is the *Word* of God.

But John has larger thoughts even than that—

if larger thoughts than that be possible—crowding into his mind as he frames this philosophy of his, previous to beginning the actual story he has to tell. Christ is the Word; and the intention which dwelt in the mind of God from all eternity was that this great Word should be spoken and this expression of the divine life should be made; and all the activities of creation, all the processes through which the world came to be what it is, looked on to, were only the preface to, that utterance of the Christ-Word; for "all things were made through him"—made with a view to His coming and His earthly day. That was what God held ever-present: "the same was in the beginning with God." And not only so, but it was God's ordaining and God's will that man should reach to his true and best life only through union with the divine life as it expressed itself in the Christ-Word: "in him was life; and the life was the light of men": clearly revealed in Him was that which man in his imperfection needed if he was to be made complete. Christ was not only the revelation of the divine life, the Word which told the divine life, but He was the

bestower of perfect life upon man, whose life was imperfect still. He is the life and light of man—the light, because man discerns, beside the Christ, how it is the Christ's fulness of life he needs must have, sees flashed out upon him a revelation of what life should be—the life, because from Christ life passes to those who will take it at His offer. And so, as we saw, John, at his Gospel's close, declares his purpose to have been, not only to make his readers believe that Jesus is the Son of God, possessor of the divine life, but to bring them, through their believing, to possess life themselves. "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name."

It is upon a vast sea of thought that John has thus launched himself and his readers before the story of Christ's human life begins. Christ is to be taken as the expression of the divine life, as the coming of the divine life to birth visibly before the eyes of men; and this coming of the divine life to the world in Christ was the thing for which the world had been made and to which

history had been tending, and which man—quite apart, it must be noted, from any question of sin at all: John has not touched that matter yet—which man needed if in the fullest sense of the word he was to live indeed. It is not (and I think that, if this be realised, our relationship to Christ, sweet as in any case it is, becomes sweeter still, and the whole Christian gospel, wondrous as in any conception of it it must always be, takes on a wondrousness more inexpressible yet)—it is not only our sin that has made us require Christ: had the human heart never turned itself to the love of things which are unworthy of its love, had the human will never taken wrong decisions to the impairing of its power and to the perverting of all the activities the will inspires—still, apart from Christ, man could never have risen to his best, could never have entered into possession of that life of God which can alone fill his nature; and even if man had not fallen so low that only a Christ can redeem him out of his lowness, he would still have had dizzy heights of divine perfection above him to which only a Christ can draw him up. In Him, in Christ, and only in

Him, was and is life. The absoluteness of the statement requires us to believe that without Him—leaving the question of sin wholly out of the reckoning—we could have possessed no more than the beginnings of life, dim aspirings after life which would have served but to torment our helpless souls. From the beginning it was ordained that with God's utterance of His Word in Christ the day of perfect life for man should dawn. So, I say, was it ordained to be, and so, as we set ourselves close to Christ, do we recognise that it is: He kindles the light wherein we see ourselves and see Him; and, as He becomes to us the light, we understand how He must become to us the life. In Him is life, and the life is the light of men.

Objection is sometimes taken to the idea that, even under a normal course of human development—a course undisturbed by the intrusion of sin—Christ would still have been the source out of which that development would have obtained its final completion, on the ground that by the adoption of that idea some subtraction is made from the honour due to the sacrifice of Christ's

Cross.[1] The Cross is no more the entirely exceptional thing it was, and stands out less prominently as a testimony to redemptive love, if it be held that anything else than the sin of man brought Christ to earth. If Christ's descent to the level of man, and Christ's relating of Himself to man and of man to Himself, be, so to say, in the natural line of things, the wondrous glow is dimmed on Calvary. I confess I can see no force in the plea. Surely it is enough to say, in reply, that belief in the inevitableness of Christ —if the phrase may stand—leaves untouched and undiminished all the wonder of that love which, when the world's sin had made the Cross inevitable too, did not shrink. It is not a smaller miracle of grace that God, having purposed to send His Son for the perfecting of the life of man, should *still* fulfil His first purpose although man's transgression had thrust the Cross among the burdens to be borne in its fulfilment, than that God should frame a new purpose of sending His Son because the appearance of man's trans-

[1] This appears to be the burden of Dr. Denney's objection. See *The Death of Christ*, p. 209 *sqq*.

gression so required. On the one view as on the other, Calvary stands as the witness to God's changeless love. Indeed, on the suggested view that Christ would in any wise have been the fulfilment of human life, the wonder of Calvary looms larger rather than recedes. Since man has sinned, man's redemption must be begun—is the conception which lies beneath the opinion that sin alone called Christ to earth. Though man has sinned, man's purposed redemption into fulness of life must nevertheless be consummated, even if its consummation necessitates the giving of the Son to death as well as to life—is the conception which lies beneath the view suggested here. And herein is certainly no dishonour either to the tenderness of God or to the marvellous wonder of the Cross whereon the Saviour died. The Cross, *interposed* in the Father's ordained design (although of course all these phrases must be qualified by a due recognition of a foreknowledge in God wherein all human history was wrapped from the beginning), may drive us to our knees in adoration no less than a Cross which is the sign of a

new redemptive process supplanting the old. A love which, spite of all the obstacles of sin, clung to and carried through its first Will, is as constraining as a love new-born.

If we may anticipate in part what will become clearer as the study of John's pages passes on, it may be said also that whenever the voice of Christ's self-consciousness is heard, there rings in it the sense that His mission to man was a mission which, however sin may have changed some of its accompaniments, would, according to the first constitution of things, have been performed. When, for instance, Christ speaks of Himself as the bread of life, the very form of the statement shuts away any idea of His self-communication having been necessitated by sin alone. The suggested relationship is too intimate and fundamental — too much grounded in the nature of things—to have been, so to say, lately adopted. And through many other utterances of Christ's the same conviction looks out upon us, though at first its glance be not recognised or felt. When Christ declared Himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, does not the second

title of the three claimed send our thought along the indicated line? Christ is the way to the Father; but He is more than that. He is the truth of God, the changelessness of God, fulfilling itself. There are "ways" which are not realised as being the "truth"— ways of accomplishing something which we adopt because the sudden arising of special circumstances compels it, but which are not in harmony, we know, with the essential truth and order of things, and which, if life had been perfectly ordered, would have found no place. They serve our turn, but it would have been better if there had been no call for their use. This method of meeting the need of the moment may be the "way" for the time being; but it is not the "truth"—a perfect management of matters would have dispensed with it. The second of Christ's asserted titles closes the door against any such conception here. He is no suddenly devised expedient to meet a special need—an expedient for which, had the world been what it ought to be, there would have been no call. But "I am the truth"—in finding their way to God through Me, men are

finding it as God always meant them to find it. In His sending of Me the Father is true to His own eternal thought. And to that idea our thoughts about Christ need to cling. That through the sinfulness of man Christ's ministry in bringing man to God was different far from what in a sinless world His ministry would have been, is of course not denied: it was sin which laid on Him His cross, sin which smote His heart with pain, sin which surrounded His gracious working with many a hindering prejudice and many a cruel opposition, sin which round the brow that should have worn a diadem wove thorns; but even a sinless humanity, if such a thing had been, would have fulfilled its destiny in God the Father only by means of God the Son; and, the question of sin wholly apart, it was the Father's good pleasure that in the Son should all the fulness dwell, and that through the Christ should there be a gathering together of all. From the beginning the Christ was, as it were, built into the Father's scheme. Sin deepened, but did not make, man's need of Him. And it is no idle and profitless speculation, but a real intensifying

of the sweetness of discipleship, to believe that even if Christ had not needed to come as Jesus to save His people from their sins, He would still have made our world glorious as Emmanuel, God with us. In Him God does what He always intended to do.

So, coming back to our Gospel's present page, we may take John as holding that from all eternity this Christ of whom he is about to tell was predestined to be the life and light of men. As man relates himself to Christ, man's life enters into the home prepared for it of old. Viewing things almost from the standpoint of the Eternal Himself (if one may say so) John beholds God putting His own life into the Christ, and through the Christ into man.

Suddenly now, as if on these heights the air were becoming too keen and rare, John drops down to speak of things as from the standpoint of man. This Christ, bearing in Him the divine life in which man was intended to find *his* life, came down to earth: it is the story of His coming the evangelist is going to tell. Well, what

actually happened when He came? What sort of a story will it be? A story of conflict, certainly —for "the light shineth in the darkness." "I shall have to tell how the dark passions of the human heart stirred themselves in resistance to this light and this life—how man, who should have taken life from this Christ, refused to live." And yet, though it be a story of conflict, it will be a story, too, leading to a triumphant end. "And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness overcame it not."[1] It was the light which triumphed after all, although it had to struggle against the darkness of the world. There will be opposition to tell of, and awful bitterness of hatred which set up a cross at last; but then a Resurrection at the end. "The darkness overcame it not." So, as he plunges into the story which has the gloom of conflict upon it, does John look through as it were to the tunnel's further end, and feel sure that he will come out into the blaze of day when his journey is done. Darkness for a while; but it was after all the light that overcame.

[1] Ver. 5, margin.

Still, the darkness fought hard against the light, even though it fought in vain. And thus it should not have been: this opposition of man to the Christ should never have declared itself; for the world had reached just to that point at which it ought to have recognised and leapt out to greet the light and life in Christ. For there came a man—sent from God, certainly, but still a man—John the Baptist, who came to bear witness to the One greater than he: thus far, at any rate, under the divine guidance, manhood had attained —to the power of recognising and bearing witness to the presence with it of the life whereof it stood so sorely in need; and still, spite of the recognition and the witness, manhood rejected the life.

It is not difficult, and it is moving, to grasp the salient point of the evangelist's thought. In this Christ was the life of men prepared and waiting for them from all eternity: men had reached to the point at which they were prepared and waiting for the Christ; and yet, though Christ was waiting for man and man was waiting for Christ, it is of conflict, and not of happy union, between the two, whereof the evangelist's pen

must write. Christ ready for man, and man ready for Christ, so that man might in very deed and truth be called Christ's *own*; but "he came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not." Poor world—so John appears to weep his heart out over it—poor world, to which the Christ had come so near, which in its Baptist had come so near to the Christ! So near, and yet you received Him not—what a pitiful tale is this I have to set down! The divine life moved down to you, and you moved so near to the divine life; and then you did not choose to live. All was ready. God had waited through His eternities for this hour to strike: the world had pressed on through its history toward the dawning of this day: there needed now, at this supreme moment, only the last touch of responsiveness from you to make all things blest and right; and that you withheld. Some there were who, in better mood and with truer wisdom, realised that here was their redemption come, and determined that not in vain should it be offered; and for these open-hearted ones life was crowned indeed. "As many as received him, to them

gave he the right to become children of God." But, looking at the whole record which has now to be set down, it can but be summarised in the mournful wail that "he came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

Excuse for the rejection of the Christ by those that were His own, John is unable to find. One seems to see how he has asked himself the question, "Is there anything to be said for them, any plea to be advanced on their behalf, through which their offence grows less? In arrest of judgment, what can they advance?" And he has seen how, so far from anything mitigating their fault, everything makes its blackness and its ugliness more pronounced. Was it a profound mystery they were asked to explore, wherein their minds might easily come to mistaken conclusions? Or was a call made upon their imagination, their reasoning powers, upon anything which some possess and others lack, and for the non-possession of which no blame could be theirs? Nay. They had but to look and see. For "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only

begotten from the Father." It was a thing about which no sane man ought to have made any mistake. The divineness in the Christ was so clear that they who did not see it must have blinded their eyes. John does not mean, of course, that all who saw or learnt the facts of Christ's human existence ought at once to have sprung to a philosophic theory of His divineness, or become able to reduce Him to formulated doctrines and set terms; but this much at least should have won their flashing recognition straightway, that here was a life and a power of a quality this earth did not know. Whatever else may have been unsettled about Him, as to this at least no doubt could be, save for those who refused to believe, that He was "full of grace and truth."

To close his preface, John turns away from that conflict which has saddened him so as he has recalled it, and lays close to his mind and heart once again the great theme to which he is going to devote his work. The light had to struggle against darkness: the Christ came, and

they that were His own received Him not; but still, this great truth remains—let me forget (he appears to say) all about man's oppositions for a moment as I set down the great truth once more —that "no man hath seen God at any time," but that "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And I think that as John wrote the words, that hope grew in him which at the end of his Gospel he expresses again—the hope that by what he wrote something of the opposition might be conquered, and some might be brought to see how in this Son the Father had been declared indeed, how in this Christ the divine life had indeed been revealed to and bestowed upon man.

Across these introductory verses of the Gospel the lesson is writ large for all time—that every coming of the Christ to the individual soul is such a coming as that coming to the world of which the evangelist tells—the coming of One who is prepared and waiting for our life, of One for whom our life is prepared and waiting, of One whose life-giving divineness is so clear that He must be

recognised as God's revelation of Himself to the world. In so far as we hold ourselves back from a communion with Christ perfect and complete as we can make it, something in us must die; for He in His fulness of life is ready for us, and we in our need of life are so pathetically ready for Him. Now and unceasingly, the hour strikes afresh for our souls to achieve their destiny in Christ. It is the supreme business of every soul to see that at not a single striking of that hour shall it be possible to say, in regard to its relationship with the appealing Christ, that the Christ came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

III.

CHRIST FORESEEN: JOHN THE BAPTIST.

JOHN i. 19–34.

HAVING reached thus the close of the introduction to his Gospel, John turns himself, or is just on the point of turning himself, to the actual history of the life-giving Christ, and stands ready to launch his readers forth upon the marvellous tale. He has stated his case, so to say; and his case is that this Christ, of whom he is going to speak, is the Son of God, the Giver of life to men; and he is prepared, now, to marshal the facts of this Christ's human life, and to show how in those facts the case, as he has stated it, finds its support and its proof. With his readers, the evangelist stands looking clear ahead into the space through which they are to take their long flight.

Yet even now, something arrests him for a few moments as he is eager to start off upon his recital: a newly-remembered thought lays its hand upon him and bids him pause. The Christ came to bestow the true life; but the hearts of men were already filled with a life which was not the true; and they needed to be recalled from the life they possessed, to be emptied of the life which possessed them, before they could be receptive toward the true life Christ brought. And therefore John lingers for a few verses upon the great missionary who performed this preparatory work—the missionary who, great as he was and great as his enterprise may have been, was but the herald of One greater than himself, of One destined to a greater and more truly redemptive ministry to the world. John the Evangelist sets, as with a few bold strokes, the picture of John the Baptist clear before our eyes.

John the Baptist is an arresting figure. The outstanding characteristic in the man himself (as distinguished from his message) was of course the utter humility which enveloped him, his pervading

consciousness that, although he was the first in time, he was but the second in rank and place, and his persistent resolve that no one should take him for other than he was. Something pathetic —I always think there is—in the figure of this giant-man. Crowds flocking to him, obdurate hearts melting at his word, multitudes looking up to him as to the only divine messenger they had ever acknowledged—and he holds them all at arm's length. "I am the voice" (only the voice) "of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." "In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose." It used to be a saying in the Jewish schools that a scholar should be willing to do his teacher any service, *except the unloosing of his sandal.* That was an office so menial that not even a master, honoured as he might be, had a right to expect its rendering. But this man, towering up as he did in his moral greatness, entitled, if any one could be entitled, to something of honour for the austere rectitude of his living—this man felt himself so far beneath the

One who should follow that he shrank from doing Him that lowest service, not because he considered it too mean for him, but because even for that service he considered himself too mean. "The latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose" John cared only to bring the people up to the point at which they should be ready for the ministries of Christ, and then he would slip away: all he did had worth and value in his own eyes only as it opened the door for the Christ; and he was willing to stand unseen behind the door he himself had opened, and to be forgotten as the Christ passed in. His influence could truly live only as it died away, and the influence of the Christ held sway in its stead.

The lesson of it holds true for the Church in all ages. Every religious agency that works on us —every religious agency wherewith we seek to work on others—has no worth except as it is a means of introduction to the Christ. All the engagements of the religious life, all exercises of worship, all holy feelings which by one method or by another may be produced in us, have, if we take them rightly, only this one meaning—they

are the preface to the coming of the Christ Himself, and must so be read. They do their true work only as they make us turn expectantly towards Him as He comes. The one phrase which sums up the true life is this—the union of Christ with us; and all spiritual influences find their only aim in heralding that union, in making it possible, in preparing the way for the advent of the Christ Himself. To rest in the mere religious exercises or the mere religious feelings themselves, as if in themselves they possessed any value at all, is the fallacy by which men are not seldom ensnared. The test for the trial of all these things is this—How far have they advanced us in receptiveness toward Christ? Have they been forerunners of Him? By these things, was the way made straight for His approach? Nothing, however religious and spiritual it may appear, is of benefit to the soul unless it has pointed us to Him who is to come; and every religious feeling of ours, every religious exercise of ours, must lead up to and terminate in, and be itself lost and forgotten in, a more real relationship between us and Christ. Religious feeling, religious exercise,

cannot be the light or the life: it can only be the witness, the proclamation that the light and life are at hand. By all spiritual agencies must we be led—by all spiritual exercises must we lead others—to One mightier than all else. Well to have the way made straight and clear; but the preparation of the way is not to be mistaken for the end of all. Over the prepared way the Christ must come.

The outstanding characteristic in the Baptist's message (as distinguished from the man himself) was that it was a preaching of repentance. This evangelist, indeed, is in such haste to get on to the preaching and the doing of the Christ, that he tells us little about the preaching of the forerunner, except that he proclaimed himself to be a forerunner and a forerunner only. But elsewhere the Baptist's message stands out, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And although it be little that this Gospel records concerning John the Baptist's word, it is not without purpose that John the Apostle sets down here the mention of his name and work. As the Baptist himself was

the forerunner of the Christ in the history of the world, so, in the history of every soul, must the repentance which the Baptist preached be the forerunner of the life which Christ came to bestow. The Baptist prepared for Christ, the Giver of the life new and true, by preaching repentance, the giving up of the spirit of the life old and false. His hearers were to cut themselves loose from their past, that they might be newly started upon their future—to empty out what their hearts held, that Christ might then fill their hearts with the life of His own. "Repent ye"—that was the forerunner's message. He gave the negative inspiration, as it were, under which they might realise the wrong of their past: then, unable to give the positive inspiration under which their future would be kept right, he passed them on to Him in whom that inspiration of right had come. "I can but make you realise how sinful you have been—but behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" By their repentance, by their realisation of the wrongness of what had been, were they to make ready for acceptance of what would be. There must be the

deliberate casting away of the old, in order that the new, as it drew near in Christ, might possess them utterly.

The soul which would relate itself truly to Christ must make its deliberate surrender of the spirit whereby, without Christ, it has been possessed. Not one of us can know Christ's baptism of the Holy Ghost, Christ's baptism of the spirit of holiness, until in the depths of our nature we have gone through John's baptism of repentance. Is repentance only for gross and open and palpable transgression? Has the word scarcely any meaning for those whose hands and hearts have not been deeply dyed with wrong? Is it claimed that, at any rate, repentance cannot be the same thing for the morally respectable as for those who have slipped far into the pit and must have a long and painful climb back? It is essentially the same thing for all. Repentance is not a sort of feeling, proportioned in quantity to the quantity of sin the repentant one has committed: it is the confession that we have been living from the wrong source, by the wrong spirit, that the spring of all things in us, out of which all we have been and done has

come, has not been the true spring of life. And if Christ is to set the spring of true life within us, to be Himself the spring of true life within us, we must detach ourselves from those other springs of life that have been pouring their life into the channels of our nature. The Christ-life can take hold only upon natures which have with deliberate purpose and conscious will cleared themselves free from all other hold. Although in the Christ the kingdom of heaven is at hand, it can only take up its rule in those who have repented of and from the spirit of their past. It is not a question as to how much right and how much wrong we have performed. With the Christ coming to us, we cannot experience the seizure of His life upon us till we acknowledge that—whether outwardly right or wrong—much of our life must be cast aside and disowned because it is not from Him that it has been lived; and His spirit *makes* us only when every other spirit has been deliberately thrust away. At the beginning of our discipleship the spirit which was not His is to be renounced: through the continuance of our discipleship, as spirits which are not His enter in

again and usurp partial control, must the renunciation be repeatedly re-made; and to one and all of us, till we be perfect, the forerunner's cry must come, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The history here set down must be the history of the experience of the soul. First the Baptist, then the Christ. If it be an ancient record, it is a modern necessity too. Only within cleared and receptive natures can the life of Christ take up an uninterrupted reign. If it be indeed as *life* that Christ comes, He must have the undivided field. For life is all.

IV.

CHRIST SEEN IN TOUCH WITH DIFFERENT HUMAN TYPES: THE FIRST CALLINGS.

JOHN i. 35–51.

THE earliest occasion, noted by John's Gospel, on which Jesus manifested before men the divineness that was in Him, is the occasion of His attachment of the earliest disciples to His cause. The narrative of the Temptation finds no place in this evangelist's account, for a reason which it is perhaps not difficult to conjecture. He is writing, one has carefully to bear in mind, with the object of displaying the action of the divine Christ among and upon men, so that men, as they ponder over the story, may realise how divine He was; and the Temptation of Christ had been a thing that took place in secluded quietude, unseen

of any human eye. Had John recounted the facts, the rejoinder might have sprung upon him, "But this thing of which you speak has no points of contact with human life: it took place, if it took place at all, away from any who could bear witness to it: if you want to convince us, tell us something which this divine Christ, as you hold Him to be, worked openly before the face of man. Speak to us, not of something which, like this Temptation of His, took place only within Himself, but of something which made others recognise His power." And, as if anticipating such a demand, John begins his cumulative testimony to the wondrous life that was in Christ by showing how men of different temperament, of opposite make, found, as they came into contact with Him, that He brought out of Himself just that for which their nature and disposition and circumstance called. "Notice first"—he appears to say—"how, as men of utterly diverse moods passed within His range, this Jesus touched at once the heart of each, had the one necessary word prepared, established immediately an abiding connection between Himself and them. Surely He who

mastered and satisfied many varieties of temperament thus must have had in Him something that lifted Him above the race of common men!"

First of all, John shows us Jesus in contact with two men who were following Him under the constraint of some mysterious spell which in all probability they would have been unable to explain, had explanation been asked. The Baptist, seeing Christ pass by, had repeated the exclamation which had once before been forced from him as the sacred Presence drew near—"Behold the Lamb of God!" And two of the Baptist's disciples—John the evangelist himself being almost certainly one of them—hearing their leader's utterance of adoration, and turning to look upon the One of whom he spoke, had been mysteriously magnetised, and had left the old leader for the new. Under vague impulses they followed, knowing not why. Here was an atmosphere that gripped them. Here was a strange music to which they were compelled to adjust the movement and rhythm of their steps. But Christ had the fitting word

whereby their vague following might be changed to a following of conscious and deliberate purpose. "And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?" If they were going to follow, they must look into their own minds and discover what, by their following, they hoped to obtain: out of this adherence of theirs, which was as yet little else than a walking in their sleep, they must rouse themselves to an adherence whose motive they could express, an adherence which sprang out of the awakened will: Christ must have a deliberate, purposeful discipleship from them, if disciples they would be. "What seek ye?"

In that the first gleam of divine loftiness in the Christ shines out. How many leaders have there not been who, for the sake of a following, would receive followers upon almost any terms? How many movements have there not been whose devotees were swayed simply by some spell which the movement wove round their unthinking minds, and whose guiding spirits were content that so it should be? And indeed, for some purposes and from some points of view,

followers who are mastered by a magic power they have not troubled to analyse or reason out are among the best followers that the leader of a great cause could have; for they will be untormented by doubts, carried by mere force of enthusiasm over many difficulties whereat thinkers would be brought to sudden halt. But not so would Christ have His work be done. They who followed must know what they sought. And in this driving in upon themselves of the spell-bound disciples, in this rigid examination of an offered homage, in this determination that any devotion to Him must be able to give an account of itself, the Christ grows great.

But will any reader of the Gospel say that this was merely a just cautiousness — worth noticing, perhaps, but nothing so very remarkable after all? "Show us something more than this, if you want us to believe that your Christ was as great as you say." Well then, John shows us next how Jesus said the one right word to a man of utterly contrasted type, the Simon Peter who was afterwards to play a part which swung

backward and forward so often between the noble and the mean. Brought into the presence of the new Teacher by Andrew his brother, we can imagine how he would let himself be carried there—with eager curiosity in him, swayed by alternating moods of willingness and unwillingness to believe that there was something in this matter which his brother had taken up, all tumultuous within as it was his nature to be. "And Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter)." And Peter of course means rock. This man, then, Jesus felt that He could transform. Rock —about the last thing, everybody would have said, with which this nature had any affinity! Like the torrent, rather, that leaps and careers wildly down the face of the rock, impetuous, beating itself madly against one obstacle after another, no calmness in it, no stability like that which belongs to the rock over which it takes its headlong way! But calmness, stedfastness, immovable strength, like that whereof the great rock is the symbol—that was what Christ meant

to produce in this undisciplined soul. Never mind what he is now—the Christ saw past all the vacillations and the follies, and discerned how at length, through what He Himself would do upon this headstrong, unreliable spirit, faithfulness and apostolic strength should be born therein. Whatever he might be now, it was Peter, the Rock, he should be at last.

And the greatness that spoke in that word—who can measure it? Many leaders know how to *use* men; but what leader has ever possessed this calm consciousness that he could so *transform* a man—swing him right round, as it were, so that he faces precisely the opposite way to that he faced before? Now, one can almost hear John triumphantly questioning, does not the Christ grow before your eyes into a more wondrous exaltation still?

Through the other two callings which John records, the same readiness of the Christ—the fitness of His spirit for all men and all circumstances—shows itself in other ways. This Jesus, who was prepared with the one right word when

men came to Him, possessed also the power to win whom He would, to make whom He would realise that they ought to be His. This perfect Leader is fitted to all; but He is able also to compel an admission of His fitness. It is by calm authority that Philip, the next disciple, is secured. "Jesus saith unto him, Follow me." This Leader, then, appeals to all: it is not only souls which have by some special experience, or through some particular element in their constitution, been attracted to Him, whom He can touch; but all who hear His word recognise—whether or no they choose to obey—that it is a word they ought to receive. Greater still thereby does the Christ become. Other teachers have their schools, their parties, their special make of scholar: it is within their own well-defined limits that they are strong, and there alone: you can draw the border-line and say that beyond that their rule does not extend. But this Jesus has in Himself an authority before which all know that it becomes them to bow down. And so He leaves all others yet further behind.

The doubter, and Christ's method of dealing with him, stands last. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael had asked. But, since there had been no malice in his doubt, and since he had been open-minded enough, when invited to come and see, to act on the advice and come, Jesus meets him, not with any word of blame, but rather with a word of commendation for the true enquiring spirit he had shown. His questioning had been the questioning, not of obstinacy nor of superciliousness nor of an idle mind: in his readiness to come and see he had shown that, if there was doubt, there was at least no guile; and for him there was the smile of welcome, with not the slightest utterance of reproof to impair its charm.

Of the most scrutinising enquiry, of the deepest probing man could bring to bear, Christ had no fear. Great must a leader be if he is willing to submit himself and his claims to the scrutiny of all who, when they would know whether there is any good thing in him, come and see. The most will have their reserves, their secrets into which they would prefer that none should pry,

lest authority should be weakened by the things revealed; and not too closely must questioning disciples make their examination: not too deeply must they probe. The veil must not be raised too far. There are shadows which must not be searched through by a too brilliant light of enquiry. Disciples must not walk over these dark places bearing a flaming torch in their hands. But this Christ, knowing that one approaches intending to sift His evidences and His claims, so far as may be, to the depths, keeps him not off, but welcomes him, accepting his very resolve to sift and search as a token of the true heart he bears.

So does John set forth the Christ with these men of many natures round Him: so does he paint in the picture of His greatness with touch after touch, showing how for one and all Christ could bring forth from what His own life contained just that whereof the life of one and all stood in need. And indeed, it is still one of the greatest miracles wrought in our world by Christ's power, that, be the moods of men what

they may, that which comes forth from the Christ is sufficient for them all. There lies no strangeness between Christ and any type of human soul—save the strangeness made by the soul's refusal to be brought near and set at rest. Some of us are like the spell-mastered disciples, some of us like Peter, or Philip, or Nathanael: rather, each of us is sometimes one and sometimes another, passing from disposition to disposition, from mood to mood: yet, the influence of the Christ upon us is not a medicine which avails for one disease and is powerless over the rest, but is the healing and redemption for them all. What must the life be that answers so completely to all phases of life in man? Surely it must be the life for which man is made, the authoritative revelation and the free offering of the life which man was destined to live; and He who has brought it so abundantly within our reach must be Himself the light and the life of men.

V.

CHRIST SEEN AS SUPREME OVER NATURE: THE EARLIEST MIRACLE.

JOHN ii. 1–11.

HAVING thus shown how the divine life in Christ had the power, as one would expect it to have if it were indeed divine, of adapting its ministries to the various natures of the various men who approached it, John proceeds to show how the divine life in Christ had power, as one would also expect it to have if it were indeed divine, over material nature too. Building up the image of his great Christ before his readers' eyes, the evangelist wants them to see now how, while His heart had in it that which mastered and answered to the hearts of men, His hand also was able to lay itself in quiet sovereignty upon the forces of nature and compel them to do His will.

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Without, as within — in regions where Nature seemed to keep herself secluded from intrusion of any power man could bring to bear, as well as in the more accessible regions of human disposition and character — everywhere John intends his readers to behold Christ's influences ranging; and so "this beginning of his signs" which Jesus did in Cana of Galilee occupies the next place in the record of His life.

A miracle, then, is what John has now to record. And yet, one misses one of the most striking points about John's recording of it unless one observes how careful he is that Christ shall not be looked upon as a miracle-worker merely, as one ready to provide a display of the marvellous simply for the sake of doing it or in order to smite the onlookers into wide-eyed and entranced admiration of His skill. The purpose which John had in view in the recital of this miracle may indeed be said to have been twofold—to show how Christ possessed, as a divine Christ would possess, the power of working a miracle, and to show also how Christ held the power under strict

restraint, affording thereby a still further proof of the divineness which inspired all He did.

For "when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine." It was her expectation, evidently, that Christ would seize the opportunity of displaying to the assembled guests the power which she must have known Him to possess: His life had not gone on until now without affording her, through a thousand ways, some glimpses into the wondrous secrets at its depths; and here, at length, was the hour for the manifesting of His glory—the hour for which she had waited through thirty years. "They have no wine"—"here is the door opened through which the light that is in Thee may shine forth and bring all these people to their knees!" Surely this chance was not to be missed. Perfectly natural, of course. Who, so keenly as the mother of Jesus, would long for men to know what He was and what He could perform? Here is the true throbbing of the true mother-heart.

And yet it was not thus, not with any intention of forcing Himself upon those who saw, that Jesus would set His power to its work. "And

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Perhaps it is worth while to say—lest difficulty should be felt upon the point—that the phrase really carries no such sound of harshness as the English translation suggests; and the sternness which one is apt to read into it is not, as a matter of fact, present in it at all. "Woman" was quite a usual method of address, and carried not the faintest trace of disrespect. "What have I to do with thee?" is perhaps not the best expression for conveying the point of Christ's utterance. "What is it to me and thee?" would be a more exact rendering; and, adopting that, one perceives at once what Christ's rebuke, so far as it was a rebuke, meant. "This power that dwells in me —what is it to me and what is it to you? To me a different thing altogether from what it is to you. To you it is the means through which honour, fame, reverence, are to be won from applauding crowds: to me it is a far more restrained and holy thing." The Christ would not employ for any such purpose of notoriety the might He had at His command: indeed, one

knows how through the whole of His life He stedfastly refused to do so: He never built up a stage and arranged the figures and invited an audience and then dazzled it by an exhibition of miracle; but whenever miracle was wrought, it was simply because divineness, with those particular circumstances around it, could not do otherwise than it did. The wonder is not that Christ did so many mighty works, but that, being what He was, the sum of them is so small. Yet it is no wonder, after all; for so, surely, would divineness, in its calm consciousness of power, and in its unfailing remembrance of the eternal ends for which alone power must be employed—so, surely, would divineness be severely restrained. When Christ did miracles, it was because then and there the miracles were the natural things for divineness to do. Called on for signs, just in order to prove that He could show signs, His attitude towards the demand was always the attitude He showed to His mother in her importunity here, "Mine hour is not yet come."

With the acceptance of His rebuke by His

mother, it became possible for the Christ to do what, when she came with her eager and undisciplined desire, He had to refuse. Realising that He was not so much her son as her Lord, that His power could not be at her disposal but must be directed as He Himself should ordain, she turned in her new submissiveness to the servants, saying to them, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." The dream of a son applauded by this company, set on a pinnacle of fame, the country ringing with that story of the miracle he had worked—that dream had melted away. He was Lord now; and all, rather than dictate to Him, must set themselves simply to do His will. And with the dawning of that mood upon His mother's heart, Christ's hour, which had not yet come when she presented her somewhat imperious claim, arrived; and He could do what the divineness in Him prompted Him to do for this company in its need. His power, which would not wake when it was called upon by His mother's mere ambition for its display, wakened when she had accepted the fact that the divine authority in Him must be left free to work out its will.

One has to remember that the whole impression of the miracle came upon the mother of Jesus rather than upon any one else. There is no hint even that the bulk of the company knew of the miracle having been wrought: the servants, who filled and drew from the waterpots, of course were aware; and afterwards, doubtless, the thing would be noised abroad; but the lesson of the whole incident, at the time of its happening, was a lesson for Mary first of all. All power in the Christ—she was wholly right as to that; but that her very appeal to Christ, made as it was in the wrong spirit and with undisciplined eagerness, shut up, rather than opened, the outflowing of His power—that was the truth which, out of the situation, her mind had to seize. The water was turned into wine when she had realised that Christ must be left to grapple with the case as to Himself seemed best.

It is fitting that a divine Christ should so guard the manifestation of His might, bestowing it only upon those in whom the meet spirit is dwelling; and so with the divine Christ will it always be. He turns all life's water into wine, enriches with

inspiring and quickening quality all the experiences whereof we have to partake, when we come to Him—not with that cry which seems to rise so often to our lips, "If Thou art indeed the Christ, this is surely the hour when Thou shouldest prove Thyself by the revelation of Thy power" (for is not that very often the spirit of our prayer to Him?)—but simply with the desire that somehow, as He will, the divineness in Him may rule the situation in which we find ourselves, make the end of it to be what He shall choose. There will be no stint in anything that makes life's feast, so long as we are seeking, not that Christ should every moment be doing some transcendent miracle for us, but that He, because He is so great, shall have His way.

To those who are of a spirit so submissive, all things grow transformed. Our demand is so often, "Because He is the Christ, this ought to be different for me, and He should make life larger here and richer there—it would be so easy to believe then!" To that there can be but one reply—"Mine hour is not yet come." But when we gather all our faculties together in face of our

life—our servants as they are—and say to them, "This life by which you are faced Christ has to deal with: whatever He saith unto you, do it"—then He does the miracle, and then the wine of life is abundant and rich. Christ's wonders are done for those who prescribe no wonders to Him, but care only that He, in His divineness, shall somehow, through His rule over all things, make all things to be divine. Keeping that spirit in us, through richer and ever richer transformations life must pass: whatever water of experience, so to say, any hour or year brings us, we shall find, as we draw off the results of it, that it has become wine of the best; and, so far from life's inspiration to us growing feebler with the growing number of our years, we shall be constrained to declare with added emphasis, as each year is added to the sum, that the best wine has been kept until now.

VI.

CHRIST SEEN AS AUTHORITATIVE: THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.

JOHN ii. 13–17.

BY His cleansing of the Temple, as these verses record it, Jesus stepped on at once to an impressive and unequivocal assertion of authority, and at the commencement of His public ministry in Judæa made clear, without any hesitancies or experiments, the line He was going to take and keep. Here at Jerusalem, in the very central place of the nation's religious life, amid surroundings which would surely have given pause to any reformer not quite assured of his mission or of himself, Jesus throws down His challenge to the world and announces Himself as One to whom the established order of things counts for nothing at all, as One who dares to lay

His hand in reproof and correction upon anything He held unworthy, however consecrated by usage it might be. His judgment as to the right of things—that is what it comes to—was supreme over the judgment of all others : the ecclesiastical rulers might permit this desecration of the sacred precincts, find excuse for it, justify it in one way or another ; but that weighed not at all against His own consciousness of what was fitting in His Father's house ; and in this, as in all other things, Jesus felt assured that His judgment was just. Without temporising, without even a glance at what might be said upon the other side of the question, He suits His action to His own first sense of what ought to be.

There was in Christ, then, nothing of the reformer who, at the beginning of his work, calculates the effect which will be produced by this possible course or by the other possible course, sets himself with something of uncertainty to the task lying before him, wonders what, under the circumstances, may be the best thing to do. There is no consideration with the view of taking

the line of least resistance. Who of human workers ever feels so sure that the spirit of Absolute Right is in him as to throw himself without possibility of retreat upon the first course the mind suggests? There comes a time, it is true, when enthusiasm for a great cause so develops in and possesses the reformer's soul, that he is raised above considerations of consequence and commits himself for a final effort to that which he thinks the best. But that is a different thing. Christ, with no great cause, recognised by others as a great cause, given into His keeping, with no cause at all except the cause which His own pure heart originated, feels within Himself that He is going to do the one thing Heaven must approve, that no consideration could alter His judgment of the matter nor any voice say to Him one word whereby the thing would be set in different light. It is not enthusiasm at all, in the ordinary sense of the word, that impels the Christ to His work: one feels immediately how incongruously, as applied to Him, the word rings. From the beginning His consciousness was the consciousness of Absolute Right, quietly

and inexorably guiding will and lips and hand.

To that one has to add—as still further separating the Christ from all others who have set themselves to grapple with abuses and to right the wrong—that nothing of self-doubt as to His own fitness for the work He had to do ever touched His mind. The narrative, as John recounts it, shows us the Christ standing in untroubled consciousness of perfect harmony with God: it is "my Father's house" He calls the Temple He is purifying; and the note of personal aloofness from all wrong is unmistakable and clear. "My Father's house." "I dwell in a different world from yours. My heart and God's beat together." The reformers of earth perform their tasks with the sense of unworthiness tormenting them, with the cry "Who am I that this mission should be mine?" ever breaking from their lips: yea, we hold them worthier so far as they hold themselves unworthy; but Christ had no part in self-reproach such as theirs. As One who, through His own purity, had the right to do it, He drives the profaners forth. From His own

soul no cloud is flung upon the relations between Him and the Father whose house He takes under His charge. The assurance of unimpaired rectitude speaks and acts in Christ.

So John shows us how Jesus, at the commencement of His ministry, took the decisive stand, stretched His claim for Himself to its full compass, entered upon no trials, no experiments, but once for all decided upon His course, though the taking of it involved a final challenge to the world and a final break with the recognised authorities before whom all bowed down. The reason for thus setting into the forefront the absoluteness of Christ's decision, the unwavering character of Christ's consciousness of Right and Truth, is easily to be discerned. John's readers are to see, as they pass on through the story that has yet to be written, how it justifies Jesus in the stand He takes. Divineness would of a surety thus declare itself—would thus throw out a claim which the future time would test; and the test of the future time would but prove the validity of the claim. Let it be considered, then,

as the coming pages are scanned, whether One who at the outset of His ministry felt so sure that He perceived the only right course before Him and so certain that He possessed unimpaired Right within—*and who ever lived up to the claim He thus made*—whether such an One must not be indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. He knew the one thing that Absolute Right dictated, and that in these early days: others know it not till the education of time has made them wise—their understanding comes to them through the practice and the experience of years: how could Christ have known it, and been so reliant upon His knowledge, except through a touch of God upon Him which has fallen upon none else? He claimed a communion with God unspoilt by the slightest marring of sin: others claim no such communion as that: if they did, you would soon find them out: how could Christ claim it, and be afterwards justified in His claim, unless it were through a richness of divine life utterly unique? It is as if John held up Jesus before us daring all criticism from the outset, offering His utter challenge to

men, and then said to us, "Now read the rest, and see whether you can find mistake in anything He did, the faintest lapse from perfectness in anything the records tell. Who must He be?" At the very start of His ministry among those whom He knew to be hostile, Jesus dares and ventures all. He gives them, as it were, every advantage for their campaign—supplies them, in the earliest revelation of His spirit, with a weapon which, should any weak places be, they will be able to use against Him by and by.

The claim of perfect harmony with goodness and with God implied in Christ's stern expulsion from the Temple of the intruding presences, is a claim which every soul must somehow examine and test, if it is to receive the fulness of Christ's redemption. For it is only by a recognition of the commanding authority in Christ, and by an assent to it yielded from our heart of hearts, that we can be at rest beneath His cleansing ministries —so searching and so penetrating are they. In one sense, He who professes to bring a great redemption to men must be, not near to, but far

from them. Will the temple of the human heart ever submit itself to be cleansed by any Christ who is not recognised as being something very different from and very far greater than the best reformers who, for all their greatness, are still of ourselves? Not with such a cleansing as He wants to impart. The purpose of performing it would be an impertinence in any one of the family of mankind who had just managed to climb a little higher than the rest. It is only as Christ proves Himself—by the claim to perfect inward purity He makes and by the justification with which the after-history seals His claim—as He proves Himself to stand alone, that we shall be prepared to submit ourselves to all He seeks to do. Before we shall be willing to yield to Him, we must hold Him unique, not in that He has mounted nearer to God than any other has reached, but in that His is the only life which has ever come straight from God to man. Taking Him so, His insistent demand to be the cleanser of our natures will but stand as the natural expression of the divine royalty that is His. This Christ, who cleansed the Temple of builded walls as none other than

the Son of God has the right to do, may, if He be acknowledged as the Son of God indeed, work upon the temple of our hearts what ministries He will; and we will not say to Him, "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" Rather, knowing Him to be the temple's holy Lord, will we let Him order its cleansing as He shall choose. The Christ who had the right, and vindicated it, to rule in the Temple of earth, has the right also to rule in the inner temple of our souls, and to make it indeed what His Father's house should be.

VII.

CHRIST SEEN AS PREACHER OF THE NEW BIRTH: NICODEMUS.

JOHN ii. 23–iii. 21.

THE division between the second and third chapters of the Gospel, coming, as chapter-divisions not seldom do, in a somewhat inappropriate place, may at first prevent us from perceiving how the account of Christ's conversation with Nicodemus follows on from and illustrates what John says about Christ's understanding of "what was in man." "Many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself unto them"—did not, that is, commit Himself and His cause to these men, believers in a sense though they might be, admitted them to no confidential relationships with Himself—"for that he knew all men, and because he needed

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not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for himself knew what was in man." They might believe on Him because of the signs, and yet their belief might be a thing not deep enough, having not enough real understanding of Jesus behind it, to secure their full admission to the ranks of His chosen and closest ones. Christ saw that much of the early faith was the result of only a surface-stirring of the waters, and in no wise a sign that the great deeps of personality were broken up. And these who made their hasty professions must be driven to take profounder soundings both in Christ and in themselves, before Christ would set upon them the final seal.

Now, to show how Jesus dealt with these people —"there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus"—who was one of those impressed by the "signs," and who in consequence hovered round Christ with a feeling mixed of admiration and hesitancy—admiration for what Christ had done, hesitancy in regard to what Christ was going to do. Coming to Christ by night, his first words reveal the mental attitude of the man, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come

from God: for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him." "A teacher come from God"—well, there is nothing very startling about that: that much might be said of a hundred others, of any one, indeed, who taught anything worth listening to: this faint praise was, in fact, only the careful opening of conversation on the part of Nicodemus — the flinging of the burden of the talk upon Christ Himself, so that Nicodemus might judge, from the reply he received, whither things were tending. He says something because, having sought Christ out, something must needs be said; but he puts as little as possible into the saying of it, so that he shall not be committed to any definite and decided course. The first *words* of the conversation proceed from the visitor: the first real *idea* of the conversation proceeds, as Nicodemus intended it to proceed, from Christ. The utterance of Nicodemus is but the preluding note, struck before the actual music begins.

Would not the new Teacher welcome a recruit from the Pharisees' ranks, conciliate him somewhat,

seek to overcome this wary caution he was showing, try—by making things as attractive to him as might be—to engage him in a deeper and warmer adherence than he had reached as yet? Would he not go half-way to meet a possible disciple such as this? So would many have done. But not so does Christ. As from towering heights Nicodemus receives His reply, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." If there was to be anything between Christ and Nicodemus, there must be plain dealing between them, at least: this ruler of the Jews must not suppose that his cautious advances will be met by responding cautious advances on the part of Christ: let this man's notions about the kingdom of God, or about any possible part he might play in the bringing in of the kingdom of God, be what they will, Christ will not tone down His majestic conceptions in order to secure one single vote. Nicodemus wanted to know how far Christ was likely to be in harmony with him; and Christ, not trusting His cause to discipleship offered with such reserves, delivers His ultimatum, as one might say—"Never mind about how far I am

likely to be in harmony with you in your notions concerning the kingdom. This is my doctrine, 'Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom.' How far are you in harmony with me?" To such a guarded liking, so unready to commit itself, Christ would not commit Himself. He knew what was in man.

It has been rightly said that this is a point which calls always for reflection — not only whether we have faith in Christ, but whether Christ has faith in us.[1] Is our abandonment to Him so complete that He can abandon Himself to us and count us among those who have really identified themselves with Him? Or has He always to be in a manner thrusting us back, telling us that we have not yet understood who and what He is, that the essence of His teaching is hidden from us still? It is possible to take Christ in all sincerity, and yet to take Him as something less than what He is; and to such a taking Christ cannot yield Himself in all His fulness. Might He not have to drive some of us back upon the fundamentals of His ministry

[1] Dr. Marcus Dods, *in loc.*

and His gospel, telling us that we have not understood them yet, and that until they are understood and accepted, admission to the perfection of fellowship must be denied us? We may and do come to the Christ not seldom with reserves and qualifications in our coming, with a mood of mind towards Him which lacks something of complete abandonment; and to such a spirit Christ cannot fully give Himself. Can He trust our trust? Is our attitude towards Him an attitude to which He can respond by an attitude of perfect self-bestowal? If not, He can only drive us back to the beginning of things once more, to the starting-point whence all true discipleship must set forth; and only when we accept His direction, and move to Him from that starting-point, and with the spirit in us which descends upon us there, are all the barriers broken down. The movement of good out of Christ to us is checked unless it be with a right understanding and a true acceptance of the main thing in Him that we move to a place at His side.

The decisiveness of Christ's teaching strikes

one here as did the decisiveness of Christ's action a little while before. As in His cleansing of the Temple He showed Himself prepared to recognise and to dash upon the one right course, so now He shows Himself prepared with the one absolute and final word. Before the problem of human character and its redemption, Christ has from the beginning but one thing to say, "Ye must be born anew." Different again is the Christ herein from all others—in this absoluteness of His, this readiness to prescribe immediately for the most malignant disease the world has ever known. The world's prophets, the great minds and souls which have addressed themselves to the question of purifying the conduct and the character of their fellow-men, have said anxiously, "Let these methods be tried. Let this effort pave the way for a more searching and far-reaching effort to follow by and by." To them the question has been a question indeed—a question which, as one asked it, set a thousand answers ringing, among which it was hardly possible to choose the best. For the Christ there was but one answer, which from

the first He knew: for the Christ there was in one sense no question at all: He had once for all diagnosed the disease and could Himself once for all proclaim the cure, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There is no tentative experimenting about it. "Ye *must* be born anew."

Human nature, on the moral side of it, calls for some one who can say to it, "You *must*." And we, although we may sometimes be inclined to resent it, have to confess, in our wiser moments, that in the matter of character and heart and soul, we need some voice which has the ring of authority in it, as greatly as we need such a voice in any of the other departments of life wherein we allow authority to have sway. In physical disease, we want a physician who can say to us, "You must"; and of the value of one who should only give hints and suggest experiments we should justly have doubt. In the diseases of the soul, complex and unsearchable as they are, it should be no hardship, but rather a relief, to have One standing above the soul in its helpless weakness, and saying to it,

"You must." The greatest of the world's ministers of redemption — after a thousand others have given their advice and made their suggestions and, with furrowed brows, painfully thought out a course which *may* accomplish something not quite in vain—the greatest of them will be the one who stands up, calm-thoughted and clear-voiced, and declares, "There is but one thing, and that one thing *must* be done, would you be made whole." And this, the Christ, is He.

What is to be said of this new birth which Jesus pressed upon Nicodemus as the necessary means of man's moral and spiritual cure? Spite of the startling sound of the phrase—so startling that Nicodemus was thrown into bewilderment as he heard it—the entire reasonableness of it, and certainly the entire sufficiency of it, becomes apparent with a moment's thought. Our birth is of course the one thing in our experience in which we make or do nothing for ourselves, but only receive from another: the life which then becomes ours is a thing wholly imposed upon

us, set into us, without any co-operation of our own: at birth, more absolutely even than at death — the time and circumstances of which may, to a certain limited extent, be determined by our own doings — are we wholly passive, simply accepting what is bestowed. How is the moral life, the character, of man to be cleared of its blemishes and kept within right bounds and directed upon true ideals? In the last resort, only thus—by finishing with all man has been and done, and by man being so held beneath the life and character of God that man's life and character may be imposed upon him from God, new-born in him out of God. A transformed moral life becomes ours, not by altering this thing or that in us, not by substituting a better piece of machinery here or there within the depths of character where the machinery hitherto employed has failed to work or has worked out wrong results, but by turning ourselves, receptive and waiting, toward God, saying, "Let the life in me be produced by and out of Thine, my inward life and being be born from Thee." We take with ourselves the course which Christ pro-

claimed as the only possible course of complete redemption when we detach ourselves from everything whence our life has been drawn till now, cease all effort at *manufacturing* a moral life for ourselves, and let ourselves be born.

Heightening of ideals of life and conduct will not of itself make life a perfect thing; for, dream as you may of high ideals, you will find only soiled and decayed materials within yourself wherewith to build life according to your dreams; and out of imperfect elements a perfect product cannot be made. Self-improvement will not lift us to the highest: one wonders, indeed, that any sane man, surveying the problem of human character, should delude himself for even an instant with the idea that he can train or improve himself to the loftiest reaches of moral living; for the only implements we can use for the purpose of improving ourselves are the faculties and capabilities of our nature; and these are themselves the very things that need to be improved. Could we once get outside ourselves, and obtain some leverage upon our own moral nature from *beyond* our own moral

nature, we might accomplish something; but since that is a feat for ever impossible, self-improvement, hampered by faultiness in the tools it employs, can never achieve a result wherein fault shall not be. Only one method can there be by which the moral nature of man may be preserved from taint and realise all possibilities of worth—yet a method all-sufficient, if only it be faithfully pursued; and that is the attachment of life to a new source, the clearing out of all we are, the filling of our nature from new and holier springs that rise in the Nature holiest of all, and the receiving of all that goes to constitute the inner life we live out of the life of God Himself. Not to be made better, but to be new-born, is the moral programme by whose fulfilment men will be redeemed. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Born of water"—water, the accepted symbol of repentance: there must be the cutting oneself loose from what has been, the drowning of one's present moral accomplishment, as it were, and the coming forth from the baptism of repentance in which it has been swept away ready to

make a new beginning again. Then "born of the Spirit"—the attaching of oneself to the inspirations of God that all we are may be derived from them and made by them, the openness of one's nature to the nature of God so that our nature comes in its degree to be but the continuation, the reproduction, of His. And so we enter into God's kingdom: so is that vast range of regnant purities and towering ideals and measureless holinesses thrown open to what is in us now, since what is in us now is what was in God and has come to us from Him. "Ye must be *born anew*."

The transformed life, the corrected life, is the life which takes its rise in God. And once again Christ re-asserts that truth in differing manner, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The verse is taken almost universally — though I am sure it is wrongly so taken—as if it were the Spirit which comes one knows not whence and goes one knows not whither. Yet so one misses what Christ is

seeking to emphasise for His hearer's mind. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." It is not the Spirit, but the transformed life, that is like the wind in its mystery. We hear the wind's voice, but there is nothing in all this wide world on which we can lay our finger and say, "It is from *this* it took its rise." "So is every one that is born of the Spirit"—every one whose life is transformed by being born out of the life of God. There is no force known to man, no influence counted among the influences this earth can bring to bear, of which we can say, "*This* is what accomplished the miracle." For it was not within the limits of this world that the miracle was wrought: far out beyond this world and all its circle of forces and influences lies the source of this wonder worked upon this human soul: it has been born of God. When you see a life transformed indeed, you cannot point to the place whence its transformation came, so long as you search this world alone, although you search it through and through, any more than you can identify the touch which started the winds upon their career. For the transformation came from

beyond this earth's utmost bound. It is the introduction to earth of something that belongs to heaven.

And nothing less than this must be understood by "conversion"—that much misunderstood word. It means the attaching of ourselves to God, that all which constitutes the moral life in us may be set within us straight from Him.

But still Nicodemus did not understand. "How can these things be?" His failure is suggestive; and his inability to understand what had been said doomed him to remain without comprehension of what was still to say. The need for such a transformation as that of which Christ had been speaking—that at least he ought to have understood: it was a thing so patent that it might even be called an "earthly thing": any one who surveyed life dispassionately should recognise that man's moral condition demanded nothing less than this absolute change, this being born anew. And if Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, had not reached so far as that, how could Christ go on to tell him the still greater wonder that in Him, the

Christ Himself, the new life into which man needed to be born had come down to earth? "If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" And yet Christ goes on to speak, even though He knew that Nicodemus would not comprehend, of those same heavenly things. "And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven." This birth into the life of God, of which Christ has been speaking, was made possible to man, for in Christ the life of God had come: man could not ascend into heaven toward it, but in the Christ it had descended out of heaven to man; and the Son of man—walking upon earth, yet most truly in heaven still because He was immersed in and possessed by the life of heaven—the Son of man was offering this heavenly birth to those who would link themselves with Him. But Nicodemus, not having realised how greatly the change was needed, would be still more unable to realise how in Christ the change was brought near; and Christ, feeling that the "heavenly things" pressed for utterance within Him and must not, under-

stood or not understood, go unspoken, utters them, through the rest of this interview, to Himself rather than to the hearer, Nicodemus saying no other word. To all this Nicodemus was strange. It was a language whose interpretation was beyond his power.

Christ's offer of Himself as the Giver of new and redeemed life grows reasonable to us—the word is advisedly employed—only as we realise the moral condition of human nature, of our own nature most of all. The required thing is that we shall search our own souls, and see if it be not a new life they need—if anything less than that will in all reasonableness serve our turn. Then, with the impression of it fresh upon us, are we to behold the Christ. And then the ministry He offers, His assurance that in Him the new life we need has descended out of heaven, will appear to us—most wondrous "heavenly thing" although it be—a thing we can accept and in manner even understand. What my soul needs, and what my soul cannot obtain, is here in Him. If I must be born anew (and how else can a moral life like mine, such an abject failure as it is, be purified

and redeemed?) I turn myself with gladness to this Christ who bears upon Him the signs that not from this world, but from other worlds, He came — from worlds of goodness where I fain would be. By the very depth of my need I am made to see the greatness of His power: understanding what is the reality and the terror of sin, I understand how in the programme of spiritual ministry which He proclaims is its only reasonable cure; and as He tells me that by my coming to Him and by my throwing myself upon Him I shall be born into the high spiritual worlds, I ask no more "How can these things be?" For I know that, made one with Him, I shall be born of God.

Upon the other "heavenly things" of which Christ went on to speak let us attempt to take some hold. What are the main points in the rest of Christ's speech to this ruler of the Jews? There is, indeed, practically only one point, though from that one point some consequences follow which Christ draws out. That one point, at any rate, let us grasp.

In brief, it is this. It is out of a divine *love* that this call to a newness of life has come: stern and deep-reaching though this demand may appear to be, it issues, not out of a relentless authority, but out of a gracious tenderness which longs to perfect the good and the happiness of man. "Ye must be born anew," and the means of this new birth is presented to you in the Son of man who came down from heaven—well, but it sounds very stern and absolute: what is behind it all? This is behind it all—a tenderness which has put itself so entirely at the service of man that it is going to stop short at nothing, not even at a cross, in order that man may be blest. This Son of man, who presses the new life upon you, does it at the bidding of love which will even suffer for your sake. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life." Just as conspicuously as that sign of Israel's deliverance was displayed before the gaze of those who cared to see, so conspicuously will this Son of man allow Himself to be lifted up—will not even shrink

from that—so that men may be drawn to Him. Knowing that for the sake of men He was going so far as that, Christ could say "For God so *loved* the world" that this Son of man came to live His life and perform His ministry and die His death. Great and stern as this ideal of a new birth and a new life may appear to be, still it is by Love it is imposed; and behind the ministries of the Christ, who declared the ideal and summoned men to Himself for its realisation, it was Love that was at work.

Christ sought thus to make His great ideal magnetic by showing how its realisation is demanded by God alike for our sakes and for His own. For Love behind the demands of God means that God wants us, and can only have us through our fulfilment of those demands—that He knows we are made for and want Him, and can only have Him through that same fulfilment. God wanting us and knowing that we want Him, and out of that Love presenting this loftiness of ideal and this Son for the ideal's attainment—with that consciousness in us, the height of the ideal appals us no more and the terror of it

passes away: the command of the God who is seated over us as Ruler is really the drawing of the God who wants us in His love; and He proclaims the command in order that He may have those whom He wants, and that they, wanting Him, may have Him too. All God's arrangements in the spiritual world are what they are, not simply because He has chosen to order them so, but because only through them and through their carrying out can His love be content. "God so *loved* the world." That is the main point in Christ's thought through these later words of His talk with the enquirer—one of the "heavenly things" which it was hopeless to expect Nicodemus to understand. Behind Christ's proclamation "Ye must be born anew," and behind His proclamation of Himself as the means whereby that strange "must" could be carried out, lay this—that God so *loved* the world as to establish the "must" and to send the Christ.

But Christ's mind passed on then to this other thing, which followed as the natural corollary from the thing He has just uttered—that, since

the ideal is proclaimed by Love, any condemnation it brings upon man is in reality a condemnation passed by man upon himself. "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world"—that was no part of His mission: it was out of Love He came. And yet, "he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." The Son comes not to judge: He comes only to present life; but whoso rejects Him judges himself, condemns himself, cuts himself off from life. How can it be otherwise? By rejection we declare what manner of men we are, pass sentence upon ourselves. "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil." Though Christ here changes the metaphor, the meaning is still clear enough. No need for Christ to judge us, when our rejection of Him is pronounced: since life—or light, to employ the other figure—comes to us in Him, we show ourselves up, judge ourselves, by the rejection, and prove ourselves unworthy of the life, unloving of the light. We

declare concerning ourselves—and there is no more need that God or Christ should declare it concerning us—that we love darkness rather than light, that from the life and light in the Son we are, and have chosen to be, cut off. Christ's coming is the offered gift of Love: if we receive Him not, our loss is all the heavier because it is the loss of something we might have possessed, since Love offered it; and the loss we suffer is a loss to which we have voluntarily chosen to be doomed.

So every rejection of Christ's ministries, though it moves Him not to judge the rejecter, must meet its judgment nevertheless. For our rejection of His ministries hands us over to the dominion of those forces which His ministries would have corrected or cast out, and allows them to have their way. And it is with constant remembrance of that solemn truth that such a ministry as the ministry recorded in this Gospel must be faced. Christ is always, not the Judge, but the Life-giver whom Love has sent; but by want of abandonment to the Life and Love, we pass our own sentence, hand ourselves over to the

forces of evil which will work their doom within our souls. Rejecting the Christ's ministries we are, in so far as we reject them, judged already.

Love behind the great ideal—judgment and destiny waiting every moment upon our attitude towards the Love—these are the great thoughts which moved through Christ's mind with the uncomprehending Nicodemus before Him. As these phrases drop from the lips of the Christ once more (and they are the phrases which He uses unchanged, and will ever use unchanged, to all who come to grasp His lesson and to learn His secret) it needs that His hearers should so write them upon mind and memory that they may pass from their interview with Him with hearts enlightened and faith made stronger, and with all these things—things both "earthly" and "heavenly"—holding them fast.

VIII.

CHRIST SEEN ROUSING SELF-KNOWLEDGE: THE SAMARITAN WOMAN.

JOHN iv. 1-38.

THE woman of Samaria, it is needful to observe in order to appreciate rightly any points suggested by Christ's dealing with her, has had set upon her an amount of blame which is beyond her deserts. She is commonly taken as an example of human nature fallen far towards its worst. But it is noteworthy that throughout the whole interview, Christ appears to look upon her, not so much as one who needs reproof for flagrant sin, as one who needs healing for the pain, and satisfaction for the sense of brokenness and failure, which life had flung upon her; and yet Christ, we know, would have been the last to attenuate or belittle whatever measure of guilt might have been

hers. Had she been one who sought for and revelled in evil, finding joy in her severance from purity and uprightness, Christ's tone would have been severer, His whole attitude more like that of a judge. That the woman had drifted into sin is of course clear; but that she had, taking her past as a whole, been more sinned against than sinning, I think it is legitimate to conclude. When one remembers that, in the laxity of practice which had overtaken the Jewish nation in this matter, a man could at any time divorce his wife if he considered that in the smallest matter cause of offence had been given, the fact that this woman had been cast off by five husbands may after all not mean very much; and it is small wonder that, after an experience of hardship and cruelty, she should at length have gone astray. And so, I say, it is legitimate to conclude that she had been more sinned against than sinning. She stands before Christ as one with whom the world had dealt harshly, who had found the cup which the world had held to her lips to be bitter indeed, who had been broken down into wrong rather than sought for it

with eager desire, and who needed sorely to be healed rather than to be reproved or blamed.

Now, with this maimed, starved, hopeless soul before Him, see how Christ sets Himself to its relief. Before all else, He wants this woman to realise the conditions of the problem, so to say—to estimate what it is she needs, to rouse herself out of mere vague yearning and set herself to a definite quest. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." He had it, and could give it: the revelations and the ministries which would have taken hold upon her broken life and raised it into wholeness were ready in Him; and the Christ could have saved her all thought about what it was she required, revealed to her at once how in God, and in Himself, God's messenger, all she required was lying. But He wants her to realise the problem of her own nature and her own need: she must know the gift of God, think

about it, ask for it, do her part and seek for it before the Christ would do His part and give.

To appropriate the full benediction of a ministry such as Christ's, the soul must know itself, take its own measure, bring out into the light of recognition its secret need and care. We meet with Christ not seldom, in the weakness and brokenness and disillusionment of life, and fancy that in some vague fashion we could not define to ourselves, all His restoring grace will be passed over to us, and that, without any effort of ours at forming a well-defined relationship with Him, He will take us into His charge. All that is left in us very often, when some hour of crisis has fallen upon us and this or that part of our life is sunk in ruin, is a vague sense that all is gone wrong, and that somehow the magic of Christ must make things right and whole. It is not to be said that such a vague, undefined hope will be in vain: one cannot turn, be it in ever such a haze of bewilderment, to Christ without finding something from Him returning upon us; but the best is not won from Christ until we know what it is we seek.

He would have us know the gift of God in Him and ask for it from Him. It is no useless thing, but a thing useful beyond all telling, to search through the deep places of our nature till we come upon the weakest spot, to learn what there has been in us that has made life break down so sadly—and then, knowing something of the conditions of our problem, to turn to Christ and say, "The gift to answer to *this* lack in me, to repair *this* flaw in me, to fill up *this* emptiness in me which has cost me so dear, is the gift I need." To know ourselves, to take the weak places in us and connect them (if it may be so put) with the corresponding strong places in Christ, to make faith and expectancy well defined and clear, is a preliminary to receiving the absolute best into our souls. And if we cannot understand ourselves, let us realise *that* at least, make the very indefiniteness of our necessities the definite thing we show, and seek for light upon the dark mysteries within. We must know the gift of God which is to match the want in us, before a perfect sacred ministry can be exercised on our behalf.

But then, as if declaring the correlative to that, Christ, while driving this woman in upon herself so that she might realise the definite thing she wanted, the one gift for which her condition called, proclaims also that, in satisfying one need, He satisfies all. It would have been living water He gave her, had she known the gift; and "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." What, this one gift cover everything? This one bestowal of water—even though it be living water, life-bringing, in regard to the immediate thirst—prevent thirst for ever? Will there not be other thirsts for which some different supply must be sought? No. The ministry of Christ—although it be a suddenly-awakened need in this or that part of our nature that moves us to call it to our aid—is, in the full exercise of it, sufficient not only for this or that part of our nature, but for all. And the point, the lesson of it, stands thus — although we need to know ourselves, our immediate want, our present requirement, the gift which at this moment our nature lacks, still the Christ is never to be taken simply as One who devises expedients

and meets new emergencies with their fitted remedies, and who, in ministering to this weakness, omits to touch that. His nature touches and meets us at this special place of necessity to whose existence we have just become alive, precisely because His nature is fitted to touch and meet the *whole* of ours. Our conception is to rise —as Christ Himself sought to make this woman's rise—from the local and transient giving to the universal giving that He performs. Behind every presenting of this or that request which we make to Christ, we are to carry the consciousness that He holds in Himself, not only the possibility of answering to the current request, but a life which, if we could but hold ourselves altogether in contact with it, would make us *fully* live, and allow no single request ever to rise in anything of painfulness again. For so will our trust in Him grow a fuller thing, our appeal to Him broaden out, till at last we may realise—or come near to realising—the promise He made, and find the water He bestows to have become in us indeed a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

It is on these two points that Christ, throughout the conversation with the Samaritan woman, lays the emphasis of His words. These are the things He seeks to impress upon His hearer with most of force; for as the talk proceeds, He does but recur to them, once more bidding the woman realise her present and pressing need when He tells her to call her husband and come hither—once more declaring Himself as the all-sufficient One when, in regard to the Messiah, He proclaims, "I that speak unto thee am he." And, to receive the perfect benediction of this ministry, our hearts must take the lessons home. In the shortcoming of life, in its disillusionment, in its sin, realise the particular need, and present it before Christ. But realise, too, that, were our relationship to Christ complete, all the particular needs of our nature would be swallowed up and forgotten in the all-sufficingness which would pass to us from Him.

Before the story is left, it remains to note (because the noting of it brings an added beauty

both upon the relationship of Christ to this woman, and upon His relationship to us) how, in refreshing the spirit of the Samaritan Christ refreshed His own, how He found His own delight in administering hope and comfort to her bruised and wounded soul. His disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat, while Jesus, wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well; and they returned just as the conversation was at its height, to find that their Master had been refreshed with better refreshment than the meat they brought could give. He had had meat to eat that they knew not of: His meat had been to do the will of Him that sent Him, and He had done that will upon this woman's heart. It is sweet to think that with every draught of the water of life He gives us, the Christ refreshes His own spirit—that as He goes to and fro about this world, waiting near the earthly wells at which men and women try to slake their thirst, His joy grows abundant when they say to Him, "Give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" — that our new life is the

Christ's new delight. For remembering that, we shall watch for Him the more alertly, and be the readier to give to Him what we can by taking from Him what it is His joy to give to us.

IX.

CHRIST SEEN CALLING FOR A SPIRITUAL TRUST: THE NOBLEMAN AND HIS FAITH.

JOHN iv. 43–54.

IT was in search of quietude that Christ had left Judæa on that journey which had taken Him through the Samaritan country, and which He is now about to complete. In that fact lies the explanation of a difficulty which the form of statement in these forty-third and forty-fourth verses may at first appear to raise. "And after the two days he went forth from thence into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country." But if He would have no honour in His own country, why go thither? It would seem to be rather a reason for keeping away. The journey

had been commenced, however, as at the outset of this chapter John has told us, in order to escape from the notoriety which was coming to be attached to Jesus among the Pharisees as the number of His disciples grew. The strain of the situation was becoming too great: as more frequent accessions to the ranks of His followers were received, the enmity of those who hated Him would develop into more marked and definite form; and Christ departs, therefore, for a period of quietude and relief, seeking it in His own region, where He was more likely to be left alone. They who had known Him from His earliest years would be the last—as a man's nearest kindred usually are the last to recognise any greatness in him—to yield Him any honour or to admit that aught extraordinary dwelt in Him; and in Galilee Christ might find the freedom from publicity which for a while He desired.

It is of interest to note, in passing, how absolutely honest John is as he compiles his record: if there be any risk to his main purpose—the purpose of winning from his readers faith in Christ as the Son of God—in showing Christ thus

retreating for a time of rest from the hostilities and notorieties of the world, John faces the risk: his picture is to be complete, not securing men's admiration for its chief figure by leaving out any lines to which criticism could plausibly take exception. He shows the Christ seeking even to hide Himself for a while. And indeed, whatever the first impression of it may be—however strange it may for an instant appear that One who claims to be divine should shut Himself away from human relations because they had become too straining in their demands—yet on second thoughts it does but draw us with all the more confidence back to Christ again. For one thing, it is only the really strong who can afford to show what may be mistaken for weakness by those who do not understand: the man who leads when he ought more fittingly to be humbly following, the man who has thrust himself into a position of eminence for which he has no real qualifications, can never afford to relax, even for a moment, the process of making an impression on his deluded adherents: let there be a second's hesitancy, and the whole imposture is likely to be

laid bare. It is in itself a testimony to the greatness of Christ that He can in this fashion lay His leadership down, and thereafter calmly resume it once more—show what might have been read as fear by the hostile Pharisees in Judæa, and then return again to advance His claims. But more than that, the very dependence of Christ upon God, as He manifested it in these retirements from the world's strain and stress, in these periods when He sought for the refreshment of His own soul (and there are more than this one noted in the Gospel-story) may bring us to trust Him the more. For as one notes how, in giving to man what He had to give, Christ was Himself receiving it first of all, and had to receive it, in His own communion with the Father—how He could do nothing except it were given Him from above—one feels that in coming into touch with Christ one comes into touch with the eternal Source of all. He returned ceaselessly to the everlasting and authoritative One, and lets us see Him so returning: as we fasten ourselves to Him we reach, therefore, to the ultimate ground of things; and the very fact that Christ sought

sometimes to pass into quietude that He might the better hear His Father's voice should but make us more alive to the strength and certainty which thrill the utterances of His voice to us. Since He could do nothing except as He was bound to God, they who bind themselves to Him are bound to God in Him.

In quest of retirement, then, Christ went to His own country. As it chanced, however, retirement He did not obtain ; for with His arrival in Galilee came the request from the nobleman for healing to be done upon his son. The request was of course a natural one ; and yet Christ's answer to it indicates how it was a different sort of request He would have liked to hear. " Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe." Believe, that is, in the sense of accepting Christ as He would be accepted, as the supreme revelation of God and consequently the supreme guide of life ; for the nobleman clearly believed in some sense already, believed at any rate in Christ's miraculous power, else his request would not have been made. That was, in fact,

the point of Christ's utterance: that is the explanation of His tone of regret. As the wonder-worker He could always get Himself accepted, so long as men and women benefited by the wonders He worked; but the higher faith, which was in His eyes the only sign of true surrender, was a far more difficult thing to call forth. So few took Christ because of what He was: so few saw the regal dignity, the divine majesty, the commanding holiness, in Him, or bowed down before these things. It was only through signs and wonders that the most could be brought to believe. And Christ's sorrow over this second-rate faith was made the more poignant by its contrast with the faith He had just seen where it was less likely to exist. The Samaritans had believed on Him, not for His mighty works, but for the moral grandeur they had discerned in Him—but ye, here in my own country, "except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe." Their only attitude to the Christ was an attitude of expectancy for whatever might come from Him to minister to their selfishness; and to the believing which carried the whole nature over to Christ, not for what could be got

out of Him, but for what He was in His goodness, to that they could by no means attain.

Christ is never satisfied with us so long as it is only the miracles He works for us—whether they be miracles affecting our condition in this world or in the next—that draw us to His side. In Christ's own estimate of things, all He does for us by way of making us happier is meant to be subservient to what He does for us by way of making us better. We are not to let the Christ make us better because He evidently has the power to make us happier—that is our frequent reading of the matter; but we are to find the greater happiness that He can give come to us naturally, and without our thinking about it, through receiving the greater goodness that He can give. The signs and wonders of Christ's consolations and Christ's healings are not to be the most prominent matters in our relation to Him, with His spiritual improvement of us added on as a sort of supplementary affair: that is to turn the whole of Christ's ministry upside down. He would be taken by us as the One whose moral greatness, when He stands before us, draws our

love and faith upon itself. Amid the selfishness of our prayers to Him, amid our readiness to make Him the servant of our desires rather than to be ourselves servants to His spiritual royalty, He might well say to us, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe."

But the nobleman, too distracted to analyse the quality of his relationship to Christ, could not, at the moment, consider the meaning of what Christ said, and had only an added word of pleading. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe"—"Well, I do not know what that means, but, Sir, come down ere my child die." And Christ responded to his pleading, as He will always respond to human pleading, be the mood which prompts it imperfect or even mean as it may. And then the nobleman, with his pleading heard and his son restored, grafted the higher faith on to the lower, and believed—in the true sense, this time—and his whole house.

Better so, of course, than not at all. Better reach to the highest faith somehow, even though by a road below the best, than not reach it at all.

The lesson stands clear for us—that every miracle Christ does for us should find its issue in our truer spiritual surrender to Him. We have been mean enough in that our faith has been so much a faith of the "signs and wonders" type: it would be meaner still if, when the signs and wonders are wrought, we should not respond to the spiritual greatness of the Christ who has responded to our selfish prayers. Let all that Christ does for us, in making us happier, be employed as an impulse to consecration, so that He may make us holier. And if the gratification of our selfish desires be thus turned into a means of grace, the hour will come at last—and better late than never—when we shall believe in and surrender to Him, not for what He bestows, but for what He is.

X.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS: "LIFE IN HIMSELF."

JOHN v.

WITH the commencement of this fifth chapter John enters upon a section of his Gospel which may be called entirely new in the method it adopts. Up till now he has been looking at Christ from the spectator's point of view, taking his stand with those whom he is seeking to convince of Christ's divineness, bidding them gaze now upon this incident and now upon that, seeming to say, "Must not He who did these things have been in very truth the Son of God?" At this stage he changes the line of treatment. From the beginning of this fifth chapter down to the end of the tenth John dwells, not in the consciousness of the spectators of

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Christ, but within the consciousness of Christ Himself. He has been speaking about Christ before: now Christ speaks for Himself. The foregoing chapters have been John impressing upon his readers what men saw Christ do and what men heard Christ say: these following chapters are John projecting himself, as it were, into the depths of Christ's mind and feeling, and revealing what goes on there. The greatness of Christ's public work has up till now been thrown upon the screen: the greatness of Christ's own inner life, the greatness He felt Himself to possess, is now called upon to come forth from the secrecies of Christ's heart.

Christ realising Himself to be the actual source and Giver of life, is the burden of the whole of the present chapter. In the discourse here recorded Christ states literally what in the subsequent discourses of the subsequent chapters He states in figures of speech—that He came to impart to men the actual life He held within Himself. The source and Giver of life, He is

here; and through following utterances He speaks of Himself as the Bread of life, the Giver of living water, the Light of the world, and the Shepherd of the sheep—all of the metaphors tending to the same point, that He came to establish an absolute union between Himself and men, to instil Himself into men and to absorb men into Himself, so that they might draw their life from Him.

The source and Giver of life, Christ here declares Himself to be. The whole discourse arises out of the miracle which Christ had wrought upon the man waiting by the Bethesda pool, the miracle whose propriety was questioned by the Jews because it was wrought upon the sabbath day. Over the miracle itself we need not linger, since the main interest of the chapter lies, not in the miracle, but in the great sermon which, in answer to the cavilling of His adversaries, Christ preached. It was at Jerusalem, of course, that the sermon was delivered; and it is worthy of notice, in passing, that the greatest and profoundest utterances which this Gospel, or indeed any of the four Gospels, record, were drawn

from Christ by the pressures of hostile criticism and amid the angers of His foes. The greater their hostility, so much the greater became the range of His thought and speech. He rose, one might say, to His fullest height, just when the hands of men were most fiercely set to drag Him down.

In the twenty-sixth verse the key to the entire chapter is found. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself." That is how and why Christ had wrought His miracle on the impotent man: just as God has the power of creating other life from His own, so the Christ has power to create other life from His own; and it was by the exercise of that power that He created life, new physical life, in the man whose life had been so long spoilt and maimed. It is only by implication that Christ notices the charge of sabbath-breaking which the Jews had launched at His head, and yet the implied answer is complete. "I create as God created; but so long as God's work of creation went on, there was no sabbath: the sabbath did not begin until

the creative work was done. And so long as I set the creative power that is in me to its work, there is no sabbath for me to break: that comes not till all my work is done." But leaving that, Christ in this discourse raises the whole thing above all questions of sabbath-breaking and even above all questions of physical healing, and speaks from the lofty level of One who would have man derive life, in all its range, from the life in Himself. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself." Just as surely as all came from God, is all that is in us to come from the Christ. In regard to all the moral content of our natures, Christ would be repeating every moment the creative work which God performed when He made the world. The spiritual nature of man is without form and void — certainly without its fairest form and void of its best contents—until Christ comes to take it in charge; and He takes it in charge, not by altering and improving what is there, tuning up the notes which have dropped out of tune, tightening the fibres which have become relaxed, but by re-

producing there what is in Himself. "Life in himself"—enough life carried in the Christ to spread itself through all men and women till time shall end. He not only corrects human action, but gives to us, out of Himself, that whence action springs: our action is but the revelation and outcome of what we are, of the life behind the action; and Christ wants to create that life in us out of His own. He not only purifies human thought: our thought, too, springs out of the life in us; and Christ wants to create that life in us out of His own. Life is not what we say or think or do: these are but the signs of life: the life itself is the root from which all saying and thinking and doing grow up, the hidden reality which constitutes the *I* beneath it all. And Christ wants to be to us in such a relationship that what constitutes *me* shall simply have been transferred out of what constitutes *Him*. He has life in Himself—is ready and willing to create other moral and spiritual personalities out of His own. And we, would we rightly take Him, must accept Him thus in His creative power.

If there seem to be any vagueness about the idea, it is only because it is so great, and deals with an experience out of the common run. It is most assuredly an idea to the contemplation of which—and to the experimental realisation of which—men and women must return, if they are to understand Christ as He would be understood. Christ as in most literal truth the Giver of life—we need to ponder it, till the strangeness which hangs over it is dispelled. We need a frequent course of John's Gospel, so that we may the better realise how Christ conceived of His relation to men. He does many things for us, the benefit of which we are to seize: outside of us, so to say, He carries on many a ministry—did so through those earthly years of His, does so now through many an influence He sends across the world to draw men to Him; but all He does, all He has ever done, *for* us is but the preliminary to what He would do *in* us; and glad as He is to draw us to Him, He is not wholly satisfied until, having drawn us *to* Him, He draws us *into* Him and sets Himself *into* us. And the Christian Church will not know the deepest Christian secret till that

is learnt. Christ has life in Himself. Out of the life He possesses He, creative like the God from whom He came, would create life in us.

It is under the guardianship of this idea that our relationship to Christ must be shaped and maintained. We use rightly this Christ who has life-creating power in Him, when we allow Him to seize upon, absorb into Himself, all that we are. To relate ourselves truly to a Christ who has life in Himself can mean nothing else or less than this —the flinging of our whole being into His, that in that communion all the living forces in Him may exert their power upon our submitted souls. Any other relationship to Christ is insufficient—is not a relationship in which His creative power is known. Some even of the standard words in which we attempt to describe what the heart and mind and soul ought to do with Christ—although correct enough, and adequate, when their full significance is grasped — are, in our common understanding of them, inadequate and incorrect; and our relation to Christ is not represented by them in its completeness. This Christ has life in Himself—how shall we, as it were, get the

most out of Him, see to it that none of this strong, living, creative force in Him is permitted to waste? Believe in Him—have faith in Him—will these phrases do? Not if they are interpreted as meaning simply that we are to assent to the truth of what He says, rest upon the sufficiency of what He does, quiet ourselves by declaring that He knows what we do not know and performs what is beyond our power. We may have that mood of entire faith towards Him, and still not be submitting our nature and life to the grip of the creative God-nature and God-life in Him. Learn of Him—will that word do? Not if it be taken as meaning simply that we are to give fixed attention to whatever proceeds from His lips, to write indelibly upon heart and mind the truths He dictates to us as we set ourselves as pupils at His feet. These things we may do, and still not be permitting the life in Him to enfold and be substituted for the life in us. Love Him—will that do? Not if it signifies only that we are to cherish His presence as the most precious treasure of life, to cling round Him with an earnest passion which does not even for an instant cool

or forget. Even with that heat of affection we may love Him, and still not have the nature in Him absorbing the nature in us. But this Christ who has life in Himself is rightly used when we hand over our whole selves in order that the life in Him may transform the self and re-create it, when the personality in us drops into the personality in Him, when the life in Him has us absolutely in its power for working out its will. This life-creating Christ must be One to whose life and nature, in their wholeness, our life and nature, in their wholeness, are given up.

Experience easily misses this—and fails, in consequence, to provide us with testimony to the truth of this voice which out of Christ's inmost consciousness struck upon the ears of men. It is not an easy thing to surrender the whole nature to the play of another. To set our life under the grip of another life, and then to abandon all attempt at interfering with the influence of that other life upon ours, is not such a simple thing: we are too restless, too prone to put forth our hands when they ought to be still and to speak when we ought to be silent—too anxious to make

ourselves instead of letting ourselves be made—for that. And this life-creating Christ does not do for us all He might, because we do not truly adjust our lives to His. We easily bring ourselves into some sort of relationship with Christ; and, because it is impossible to be in any sincere relationship with Christ without being the better for it, we rejoice over the grace which even our imperfect relationship bestows, and forget the grace which through the imperfection of our relationship we lose. All is not done on our part, and all is not done on the Christ's part, until we transcend all other relations, and rise into this relation—or fall into this relation, should rather be said—the relation of surrendering all we are to the play and influence and re-creative power of all He is. Many steps we may have climbed up the ladder that brings us near to Christ—has the last flight been taken, the flight which carries our life to nestle in the deepest recesses of His own?

Of course any consciousness which could speak like this, and with justice, must be the conscious-

ness of the Son of God. To create is God's own prerogative: whoso truthfully claims to create must be indeed divine. Man alters what already exists, combines the present material into new shapes, cuts and carves and uses what lies to his hand; but he has not done one single *creative* act since the world's history began. Man cannot truly make. But Christ's claim for Himself is that He can create life in us. And if they who let Him do His work upon them find that, in proportion to their surrender, He does indeed transform the basis of being in them into something new—gives them, not only new thoughts, new ideals, new programmes of conduct, new inspirations (all that is far short of creation, and could be done by any human reformer possessed of the necessary human knowledge and character and skill), but a new *life*—they are entitled to say that He who has wrought this work in them must be from above.

XI.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS: "THE BREAD OF LIFE."

JOHN vi.

WE saw, as we looked at the previous chapter of the Gospel, that in that chapter Christ was giving definite proclamation to the central fact that the life in Himself was to be handed over to form the life in man. As God exercised creative power, so was Christ going to exercise creative power in those who rightly surrendered themselves to His spell. We noted also that in some of these subsequent chapters, and in the discourses they contain, Christ repeats the same fact in more figurative fashion, declaring Himself to be the Bread of life, the Water of life, the Light of the world, and the Shepherd of the sheep—all the

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metaphors leading in the same direction and tending to the same point, namely, that the true relationship between man and Christ is a relationship in which man does nothing less than assimilate Christ into himself and live by Him. In this sixth chapter it is as the bread of life that Christ declares Himself, as the food whereof man must partake if life in man is to be sustained at its true level and in possession of its true qualities; and the fiftieth verse of the chapter may be taken as supplying the key-note of the whole, "This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." The utterance finds its starting-point, as did the preceding utterance, in a miracle which Christ's power had wrought, and which Christ takes for a text whereon to base His words. He had fed the multitude, not with bread that sustained the soul, but with bread that could nourish the body only; and as the crowd, remembering how easily He had answered to their physical need, seek Him out again, His thought passes away from the physical life in them, to which He had given

its needed bread, to that other life in them, for which they were caring so little, to which He would give its needed bread too—for which He would be Himself the needed bread. "Ye seek me . . . because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled. Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." Could He but make them see how in Him they might look for the sustenance, not alone of the physical nature, but of the spiritual nature for which they as yet felt no concern! For the inner life of the soul and spirit, He was the bread which came down out of heaven, that a man might eat thereof, and not die.

What suggestion emerges from the phrases, to assist us in comprehending the relation in which Christ desires to stand with the natures of men? He is the bread of life—thinks of Himself as actually the nourishment whereby the life of the soul and spirit is kept strong and undying. As the physical frame receives into itself the bread which repairs the lost strength and restores those

elements in the physical frame which under the demands of living have wasted away, so must the spiritual frame—all the aggregate of moral impulse and all that goes to make character and all that constitutes the personality in us—receive the Christ into itself, would we be sure that it shall never fail. Christ's thought of Himself as the bread of life goes far beyond any idea of His teaching strengthening us to live rightly, or of His influence guarding us against whatever would destroy the best life in us, or of His inspiration vivifying us so that far reaches of spiritual life, which have been hitherto outside our attempting, may be brought within our compass now: not alone is the soul to take gifts from Him, but of *Himself* must the soul partake, as truly as the body partakes of the bread by which it wards off the ever-threatening touch of decay and death. "He that eateth me, he also shall live because of me." "*I am* the bread of life." The life of true relationship to Christ is made by the assimilation of Christ. The phrase may need to be somewhat qualified and guarded presently; but for the moment let it stand. The moral and spiritual

life in us is to feed on the Christ. All that makes character in us must adopt Him for its food, and, as our character works Him into itself, unites Him with itself, feeds upon Him, our character will truly live. Would we be related to the Christ with the relationship round which here His thought is ranging, there must be the actual taking in of Christ; for He is the bread of life.

If it be said that this looks in the direction of mysticism, it is to be replied that this mysticism at any rate saves the responsibility of the soul unimpaired, preserves its individuality well defined, and not only leaves room for, but requires, effort definite and direct. If Christ be life's bread, then in order to secure for ourselves whatever Christ has to bestow, and to secure it permanently, there must be activity, deliberate and earnest activity, on our side of the relationship; for bread does not *give itself* to man in his need. He who will make no effort to obtain, who keeps his hands hanging inactive at his side, might starve with abundance all around.

Bread must be seized upon, or we die. And it may be that Christ wanted to set up this idea of Himself as bread which must be deliberately taken, for the complement—not by any means the contradiction, but the complement — of the idea of the preceding discourse, the idea of Himself as the Creator of life. The Creator and Giver of life in us, is He? Oh! then we have only to let Him do His creative work in us, and religion may become a sort of emotionalism. This life of His to be transferred to, created in, us—the idea might throw us into inactive mood by the very beauty and poetry of it, and by its suggestion of all-sufficient power in Christ; and we might content ourselves with simply waiting in rapt expectancy for that new life to be born. But take the other figure. He is the bread of life; and that must rouse us; for bread does nothing for man except as man goes forth for it and seizes upon it and makes it his own. Christ is to live in us; but He will not do so through any of our poetic imaginations about Him, or through any of our entranced admirations of Him, or through anything less than our de-

liberate taking of Him into ourselves. The needed thing is to set ourselves in presence of the Christ, and then with conscious purpose to adopt Him into us. "I call in Thy will to envelop and supplant mine own. I take Thy spirit and cover up mine own therewith. I draw in, so far as the power to do so lies in me, I draw in Thy heart to beat with mine. And all that Thou art, I summon to come in and pervade me through and through, till in me there shall be nothing which does not live by the feeding of my nature upon Thine." Christ is the bread of life, and must therefore be deliberately seized upon by those who would possess the life which in Him is stored up.

In the fact that bread needs ever to be re-taken lies yet another call to effort from the Christ-fed soul. As bread for the sustenance of the physical nature has to be constantly obtained in fresh supplies, so our relationship with Christ has to be constantly re-formed and re-started, with a repetition of the act whereby it was first made. The "finished work of Christ" is one of the standard phrases of religious

speech—and a phrase which is, of course, in the right understanding of it, entirely valid and true: only one needs to set over against the truth of it this other truth, that if Christ's work in regard to us has been finished once for all, our work in regard to Him is never finished, but must be ever re-done. Once for all He has lived His life for man and died His death for man and set Himself in His resurrection life before the world in order that He may be changelessly the Saviour for man; but we have to repeat the acts of uniting faith and love and surrender by which there pass into us the benefits of His completed work. You cannot take bread to-day, and expect the physical life in you to be sustained to its end by to-day's partaking: you cannot say with any truth or reason that in one act of faith in Christ or of acceptance of Christ your spiritual condition has been put beyond all fear of weakness and failure for all time. If Christ be, as He declares Himself to be, the bread of life, then the spiritual nature in us—however joyfully it may have once partaken of the holy feast—cannot endure with its strength

unabated unless moment by moment it reaches out, with no diminution of its first energy, for new supplies of the bread which is its staff and stay.

But as Christ's mind moves round this relationship He wants to sustain to the souls of men, His thought sounds a further depth. He is the bread of life, but not only that. He is the *living* bread. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven."

It is an indication that the analogy of the food by which the physical nature maintains itself fails somewhat after all. The relations between Christ and the soul become too profound for the relations between earthly bread and the physical frame to supply any complete likeness to them; for the physical life is sustained by that which itself has no life, while the spiritual life, the soul, is sustained by that which is itself living. What it comes to is this—that at each taking in of Christ we are not so much repairing and maintaining the spiritual life that is already within us, as adopting new spiritual life from Him: receiving the Christ into ourselves, there follows,

not the transforming of His life into ours—as the analogies of bodily sustenance would suggest —but the transforming of our life into His. The bread wherein the soul finds its nourishment is itself living, and so it is the life in the bread taking hold upon the soul, absorbing the soul's life into itself, rather than the soul taking hold upon the bread. It was said that the life of true relationship to Christ is made by the assimilation of Christ as the food of the inner life: more accurate still is it to say that the life of true relationship to Christ is made through *being assimilated by* the Christ; for He is the *living* bread. The spiritual life within us must reach out after the Christ who is its only sufficient food, and must bring the Christ close upon itself. But then the relation is perfected, not after all by the soul taking the Christ into itself, but by the soul allowing itself to be taken into the Christ. Since the bread whereon the spirit lives is itself most living, the spirit has not to win life from it, but to be enfolded by the life in it; and our feeding upon Christ comes to be the passing of all the elements and forces of character in us

into the life and character in Him, and losing themselves there.

Immortality is implied in this conception of the relations between Christ and the soul. "This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." The life which feeds upon an undying life must itself be undying. The physical life must cease when it can no longer renew and repair itself from something beyond; for all that earthly bread can do is to maintain life that is already there—to *maintain* it, not to *give* it. The whole thing depends upon our power to make life for ourselves out of the bread whereof we partake; and, with that power lost, life cannot endure. But partaking of this living bread, deathless and immortal the spirit must most surely be; for from the living bread new and inexhaustible supplies of life are evermore to be won. It is no more a question as to how long our power of obtaining life for ourselves and maintaining life within ourselves can persist: it is but a question as to how long life will continue to pass into us from

Him who is life's source; and since He is the living bread which came down from heaven, where is the eternal source of all life, life for the soul that feeds upon Him can never fail. Immortality is the spirit's assured heritage, since it depends, not primarily on what we are, but on what that Christ is, from whom our spirits live. Immortal with God's own immortality is He: the life He possesses, wherewith He feeds His own, is come down out of heaven; and therefore, "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever."

From the commonest, most ordinary act of our daily living—the simple act by which we nourish and keep healthful the physical frame—Christ would thus have us learn something as to the nourishing and keeping healthful of the spiritual constitution wherein our true life lies. He is the bread which came down out of heaven in order that, by their partaking of it, the eternal life of heaven may become the portion of dying men. Yet He is the *living* bread, so that the accepting soul transforms, not Him into itself, but itself into

Him. Whoso realises his dependence upon the Christ who is the spirit's true sustenance, and whoso sets himself to partake of the Christ as in His sacramental love He offers Himself, shall hunger no more.

XII.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS: "LIVING WATER."

JOHN vii.

AS in the sixth chapter Jesus has proclaimed Himself to be the living bread, so in this seventh chaper He proclaims Himself to be the living water; and therein the essential significance of the chapter is to be sought and found. True, it is not until the chapter reaches its thirty-seventh verse that the record of the proclamation appears; but all that has gone before has been designed to lead up to that; and one sees how Christ, through all the preceding incidents of the chapter, has had in mind the intention of springing the proclamation of Himself as the water of life upon those who might hear Him in the Temple courts. His brethren—those brethren

who had not yet brought themselves to believe in Him—wanted Him to give so signal a proof of His Messiahship that their uncertainty about Him might be swept away. So at the commencement of the chapter we find them saying to Him, "If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world." If He were the Messiah in truth, let Him give the signs of Messiahship for which the people were waiting and expectant: then the brethren and all the rest would find themselves forced to believe. But "Jesus therefore said unto them, My time is not yet come." This sort of manifestation—such a proof of His claim as they would hold satisfactory—He would not give: He would not take His way to Jerusalem with any idea of setting up and occupying such a Messianic throne as the mass of the nation desired to see. For His purposes, such a throne would be worthless: it was a different Messiahship that constituted Christ's ideal. Still, He meant to go up to this feast, not to conform to their purposes, but to carry out His own; and "when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went he up also,

not publicly, but as it were in secret." Then, through the days of the feast, He "went up into the temple, and taught"—preparing the way, by those teachings recorded in the body of the chapter, for the supreme announcement which at the end He meant to make. And as the last day, the great day of the feast, dawned, the opportunity for which He had been waiting was reached, and "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." It was in order to make that proclamation that Christ had guided His way to Jerusalem, and had mingled with the crowds which were gathered in the city for the season of the feast.

It must be recollected that all who heard would at once attach a very definite meaning to this call of Christ's: to none of them could there be any obscurity about its metaphor: to a Jewish mind the utterance must have been perfectly clear, and must have rung out as an explicit claim on Christ's part to be the Messiah for whose advent the nation hoped. Christ did

after all go up to the feast to manifest Himself as the Messiah, although not in the manner His brethren wished Him to adopt.

This feast was a kind of symbolic representation of a portion of Israel's past history, commemorating the nation's sojourn in the desert and its entrance into the promised land. For seven days the people lived in tents or booths, recalling thus the time when their ancestors had dwelt homelessly in the desert: at the end of the feast, on its last day, they went, as the close of the chapter has it, "every man unto his own house," recalling how, when the desert homelessness was past, the nation had taken possession of its own. Besides that general symbolism, there was another rite connected with the feast which led up with perfect naturalness to Christ's declaration of Himself as the living water. On each of the seven days, water was drawn in a vessel of gold from the pool of Siloam, and then borne in joyful procession to the Temple to be there poured forth, as a remembrance of the mercy with which God had caused water to be brought out of the rock

in the people's desert years. But on the last day, since that day commemorated the entry into Canaan, this rite was not observed: water needed to be obtained from the rock no more, since the land with freely-flowing streams had been attained. More than that. It was an article of Israel's Messianic hope that, just as the waters of Canaan had been opened to them after the droughts of the desert, so when the Messiah came—when the dryness of the period of expectation was past—a fountain of water would miraculously spring up within the Temple itself, signifying that the time of perfect refreshing had arrived. It is clear, therefore, what Christ's words must have meant to the crowds. "We are here, longing for the day when that fountain shall break forth in this Temple of ours, because we shall know then that our Messiah is come indeed. And this man is calling us to find the fountain in him! We expect the water that is the sign of our perfected life to well up here in this Temple: he cries, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink! That can only mean that he claims to be the Messiah himself!"

And of course they would rightly interpret Christ's utterance in reasoning so. He claimed to be the reality whereof that fountain for whose birth they were looking would have been the sign, had it sprung forth. He claimed to be the One to whom their history had been pointing, the One in whom all their aspirations—if only they interpreted their aspirations aright—were fulfilled.

To conjure up the circumstances in this manner before our eyes gives us added power to understand more completely the significance of Christ's proclamation of Himself as the living water. And what that proclamation meant, or should have meant, to these hearers of Christ's own time it means, or should mean, to us, the hearers of this present time, which is indeed Christ's own time still. How does the relationship between Christ and the soul of man present itself to us in the light of the proclamation which this chapter records?

Christ's declaration that He would make the living water to spring up emphasises the fact

that in His relationship to the individual soul the soul finds an entirely new era to be begun. It was the hope of Israel that when the fountain for which they looked should flow, when there should come the Messiah at whose advent the looked-for fountain was to arise, their national life would be, not merely improved, but transformed, finding wholly new activities, being directed upon wholly new ideals; and Christ's declaration of Himself as the true spring indicated that He looked on Himself as bringing an entire transformation of life for the nation to receive. When Christ claims to have the living water in Himself, He means that His gift of Himself to us involves, not simply improvement, but newness. With our relation to Him we commence an absolutely fresh chapter. We are to take Him with a larger hope in the taking than the hope that He will make a few corrections here and there, or touch up for us this point and that. His coming to us is the springing up of a quite new stream of life, on whose bosom we must allow ourselves to be borne. And if we realise that, it makes our relationship

with Christ an altogether more hopeful thing. If He came only to repair, to add on something to what is in us already, our real life would not be taken very far beyond the stage it has reached. But if our relation to Christ marks a fresh beginning, an attachment of us to a source of life wholly new, then our possibilities stretch further and our hopes of living indeed may mount higher and our flow of life must become as great and pure as the flow of life from that source can be. Christ must be taken as the beginning of a new chapter for us—or as the beginning of a new book, perhaps it would be better still to say. We must give ourselves to Him, not to be improved, but in order that an absolutely fresh spring of life may be opened for us in Him.

It was, besides, a ceaseless and inexhaustible fountain on whose up-springing the national hope was set; and in declaring that the true fountain was in Him, Christ declared that the relationship of human souls to Him was no temporary expedient, but a method of life which could not fail

and which would suffice for all time. Our spiritual nature needs to find some means of sustaining itself to which it shall be able to cling fast: we have tried experiments enough, found many ways of bringing an apparent and temporary satisfaction to the needs of the soul, and then discovered that the seeming satisfaction was a delusion and a snare: our relationship with Christ once formed aright, we have taken the means of satisfaction which will never play us false. He is the inexhaustible spring of life. And it is not a useless matter to remind ourselves of that, because there is so much energy wasted—even by those who claim to have surrendered to the Christ—on what can only be called experiments in satisfying the soul. We forsake too often the one pursuit on which we ought to concentrate—the pursuit of consolidating and establishing our attachment to the Christ-source — and spend ourselves on a thousand things which heighten the emotion and produce a spurious sense of life, which is after all no life, within us, as though the supply from Christ were not inexhaustible and sufficient, and we needed to have some other springs in reserve when the

supply from the Christ-spring breaks down. The life which flows into us from Christ is sufficient for our to-day, and its tide will be no less high for our to-morrow if we keep our attachment to the source unimpaired, and through all our days no failure of its streams can be. Christ is the inexhaustible spring: it is our part, therefore, to do but this one thing—to perfect our attachment thereto. All other efforts of ours are but wasted strength.

Christ the source of a life that is new—Christ the source of a life that is inexhaustible the ages long—so does His proclamation of Himself as the living fountain set Him before our eyes. It is, of course, only saying in changed manner what He has said before. Life in Himself—the living bread—the living water—it all leads to the same conception of the relationship between Christ and man, and indicates that only in absolute union between man and Christ is the true relationship found. It is but playing the same melody in varying key. Let each lesson in its turn write its impression upon the mind. As the water of life

—new and exhaustless—is He now to be received. In our need of such a full and ceaselessly-flowing life, in our hope of it (as vain apart from Him as the Messianic hope of Israel apart from Him was vain) He comes to us and, if we allow Him to do so, will make the spring to leap up within our hearts as He establishes Himself there. And thus the soul's long drought passes; and they who have sought for water out of the rock, and sometimes sought it for nought, find the new age begun as the streams flow full; and the Christ leads them unto the living fountains of water which in Himself are rising, and so wipes away all tears from their eyes.

XIII.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS: "THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

JOHN viii., ix.

WE may pass over the paragraph with which the eighth chapter begins—the paragraph recording the story of the woman taken in her sin—partly because it is doubtful whether the paragraph ought to stand there, since most of the manuscripts of the Gospel omit it, and partly because it in any case marks only a parenthesis in the steady revelation of Himself as life-giver which Christ was carrying on. Of course to say that the legitimacy of the paragraph is open to question is not by any means to say that the incident it records did not happen, but only that it is uncertain whether in this particular Gospel or at this particular place of the Gospel the

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record should find a home. Be it as it may, the thing which calls for notice, now that we have heard Christ declare Himself as the Creator of life, the Bread of life, and the Water of life, is His declaration of Himself as the Light of life, the declaration which sounds out to us from the twelfth verse of the eighth chapter. "Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Just as Christ's previous announcement that they who thirsted should come unto Him and drink found its origin, as we saw, in one of the rites of the feast of Tabernacles—the rite of bringing water from the pool of Siloam and pouring it forth within the Temple bounds—so is it with this announcement that in Him the true and lasting light is kindled. Lamps were set round about the Temple during the time of the feast, in commemoration of the Pillar of Fire which had through the desert been the people's guide. And as Christ had claimed that in Him the symbol of the water had its antitype, its fulfilment, so He

claims now that these symbolic lamps, while they reminded the onlookers of the light by which their wandering fathers had walked, had their symbolism perfectly realised in the light which He, the Christ, would shed abroad. As He was the world's living and lasting water, so was He the world's living and everlasting light.

Christ gives life, then, as light gives guidance —simply by shining Himself, if one may say so, into the natures of men. Precisely the same idea in substance, let it be observed, as Christ has enunciated in other methods before. We have heard Him speak of Himself as the Creator of life in man: man, therefore, has simply to open himself to and to receive the Christ and the creative impulse with Him. We have heard Him speak of Himself as the bread of life: man, therefore, has simply to receive Him as the physical nature receives its sustaining food. We have heard Him speak of Himself as the water of life: man, therefore, has simply to receive Him and to let the spring of life that is in Him leap up within. Now He is the light of life: man, therefore, has

simply to receive Him as the world receives and is bathed in the light of day. Precisely the same idea—and yet, as is important to note, with a new element added to its content. For you cannot speak of light without at once suggesting the darkness which is in contrast with light ; and in calling Himself the light of the world Christ addresses Himself directly to the problem of the world's sin, and declares that even for that His ministries are enough. The life-giver—the bread of the soul—the living water—yes, that is all very well, but what about this question of corrupt hearts and tainted wills and natures warped from their comeliness—this question with which all who are going to minister effectually to men must deal? And Christ makes His answer, "It has none of it any terror for me. Dark as it all is, I am the light which can shine it all away." What makes all other ministries powerless, or to a great extent powerless, has no effect upon the ministry of Christ: it is not with Him, as with many, that under favourable conditions, with man in his normal and healthy state, He can minister to man, but finds His working checked when man

has swerved out of the proper line of development: this life which Christ has to give is food for the nature which yearns to be fed with life, and water for the nature which longs to have the streams of life welling up within it; but it is also light for the nature which feels itself, by reason of its unworthiness, wrapped in impenetrable gloom. Let the conditions of man's inner life be abnormal and crossed and muddled as they may, thrown into such utter confusion that darkness black as night is the phrase which most accurately describes their state, Christ's claim for Himself is, "Only let me come near, and the thick banks of darkness piled up and up within that heart must be dissipated as I come." Others can only work in natures already lit up: Christ is Himself the light.

For the purpose which John had pre-eminently in view in the writing of his Gospel, it is of value to record this claim which Christ made on His own behalf—this claim of entire competence to deal with the conditions of life at their worst. John writes to show that Jesus is indeed the

Christ, the Son of God. Well, how does this Jesus bear Himself with all the darkness of the world before Him? The question is crucial. He offers great gifts, holds up supreme ideals, catches at the aspirations and yearnings of human hearts and says that He can fasten them to that which will make them abidingly content—yes, but sin, this great shadow which enfolds man, this pall of night which appears as if it could never lift again, what has He to say to that? At the supreme moment, does His promise fail, His ministry draw back with nothing more that it can do? Has He all the secrets except the one last secret without which all other secrets might as well be left untold? Nay. "I am the light of the world!" His claim for Himself is that the worst darkness is nothing to Him, that the sin which veils human life with its heavy shadows daunts Him not, that at His coming the darkness flees. Look at the great Figure—John seems to call—listen to the great claim! "Sufficient to cope even with the problem of sin itself"—that is its sum. No one would be fool enough to make such a claim untruly; and if by this Jesus the claim can be

truly made, verily He must be the Son of the living God.

In regard to our relationship with Christ, this metaphor has the same message and suggestion as all the rest—that the actual mingling of the Christ with ourselves, the actual substitution of His life for our own, is the indispensable condition for the establishment of a relationship such as He would have. If Christ be the light which scatters the soul's darkness, we have but to set ourselves beneath His shining and to let Him shine, would we be touched with light. Christ's shining upon us the simple remedy for our darkness—the impinging of Christ's nature and Christ's life upon ours the simple remedy for our sin—thus is the secret to be read. Only to *receive* Him is the gospel's changeless call. Not to *make* anything, not to *do* anything—only to let Him shine! The sin in us is to be destroyed, not by direct conflict against it, but by putting ourselves under the personality of the sinless One. For He is light, so that the very kindling of Him near us, within us, must make it light near us and within. How

do we cause darkness to give way to light? You go into your darkened room, and you do not *do anything to* the darkness: you do not (the very idea is grotesque) take it out by handfuls or expel it by any mechanical pressure. You do but kindle the flame, and the darkness is gone. This darkness of sin within us, this black fog of corruption which so pervades our souls—take not so much thought to drive it out, but take more thought to let the Christ-light in. The gloom and fog will go. Our whole spiritual exercise should be this—to keep the Christ-nature and the Christ-life near us, and to keep ourselves near to the Christ-nature and the Christ-life. What transformation our natures need will be accomplished then, because where Christ is, un-Christliness cannot be. What communion hath light with darkness? Only let enough light in—only let the whole nature, not a part of it, be turned, and only let it be always, not intermittently, turned, to the Christ-sun—and the darkness must be past. We have not to drive out the soul's darkness. We have but to let Christ shine in. To clear sin out of us, we have but to admit the

Christ. Our care should be fixed, not on the door by which we hope to thrust sin forth, but on the door by which we mean to let Christ in. For if He come, sin must slink out ashamed. The positive kindling of the Christ-life in us is the thing for which we must seek, for so we shall walk in darkness no more.

Yet the ninth chapter (which, closely related as it is with the main idea of the eighth, needs to be permitted to make its impression at once) supplies us with a counterbalancing thought. In the ninth chapter John passes on — clearly with perfect comprehension of the connecting links, and with deliberate intention that his readers shall comprehend them also—from Christ's declaration of Himself as the light of the world to a miracle of Christ's which illustrates the spiritual truth in the physical sphere. Christ brings light to man in the spiritual sense: here He brings light to man in the physical sense, and makes the blind to see. And that Christ Himself wanted the physical miracle to be taken as an illustration of the spiritual ministry is evident from this—that in the

presence of this man He echoes His own words from the previous chapter, and repeats the declaration He formerly avowed. "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world." The beholding of this man, to whom He is going to restore the lower light, stirs in Christ again a vivid consciousness of His mission to bestow upon all men the higher light; and as He has the power to give to this man in his need the illumination of his darkness, so has He the power to give to men and women in the deeper darkness of their inner life the illumination for which they wait. The miracle presents itself to John after it has been performed, just as it presented itself to Christ even while He was performing it, as an illustration in the lower sphere of Christ's ministries in the higher.

But one of the first things which starts up and forces itself into notice, as the account of the miracle is read, is that Christ compelled this blind man, notwithstanding his helplessness, to take some part in the work of his own healing. He had to go to the pool of Siloam and wash; and it was when he had done this that he "came

seeing." Christ was the light for him, and yet he had to bestir himself and make an effort of his own before the shining of the light was his.

To the declaration that spiritually Christ is the light of man, we need always to add the counterbalancing declaration, with its warning, that not for us is the shining of the light until we have done our part. We came previously upon practically the same point, when we were pondering Christ's proclamation of Himself under the other metaphor as the bread of life: it was a fair inference, we saw then, from His use of the metaphor that upon ourselves something of the burden lay; for bread does nothing for us unless we stretch forth the hand and seize it. It does not of itself feed our hunger, but must be sought for and grasped. But here we have something more than an inference—here is an actual concrete instance of Christ making His gift dependent in part upon the effort of him who was to receive. We need always to hold the balance true between the idea that all for us is in Christ and the other idea that a burden rests nevertheless upon our own hearts: when one idea is exclusively held,

and the balancing idea forgotten, you get a conception of the Christian life which can in no wise lead to the highest results. In all the darkness of our bewildered moral nature, in all the shadow of our sinfulness, Christ is our light; but He wants us to do some work of preparation upon ourselves before the light that is in Him can shine in. All is to come from Him; and still we have something to do in making it possible for all to come from Him. Indeed, on this as on all subjects which go down to the deeps of things, one has to give utterance to what sound like partial contradictions, but are really only different sides of the same truth. Nothing is required of us but faith; and the apparent contradiction is that we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Every influence that can improve and refine and sanctify our inner nature is in Christ, and Christ alone; and the apparent contradiction is that Christ seems to demand from those who would be His disciples so much which discipleship might perhaps produce, but which can hardly be present before discipleship begins. The truth amid the seeming contradictions is of

course this—that before Christ's grace can come forth upon us, there must be self-preparation, self-discipline, a clearing of the inner life from prejudice and obstinacy and bondage to habit, a whole programme of preliminary things whereby the soul may be got ready for Christ to come in. Not that the preliminaries have any particular positive virtue in themselves: the positive grace is to come from Christ; but the way is to be prepared for its coming by the self-discipline we set ourselves to go through. The man had to go to the pool of Siloam and wash before he could see, although the light of the world stood beside him; and the fact is symbolic of the preparation required of us would we have the Christ shine in. He is the light of the world, indeed—but the phrase must not lull us into spiritual sloth, nor make us fancy that on undisciplined natures the light will shed its rays. Before you can appreciate the light-giving power of the sun, you must at least open the eyes which have been closed: before you can appreciate the light-giving power of the Christ, you must at least open the eyes of the inner nature; and it is

not such an easy thing there. For co-operation with Himself does Christ call, if He is to perform His miracles; and a burden of responsibility rests upon us still, although all grace is in Him.

Returning for a space to the eighth chapter, which for a while we left, it is noteworthy how, when Christ's declaration that in Him the perfect light was shining roused into fiercer hostility the irritated Pharisees who lay in wait to catch Him in His words, Christ's tone rose higher, and how He reiterated, in more pronounced form than perhaps at any other time, His claim to closest intimacy and most entire harmony with His God. Or, if elsewhere assertions of equal force are to be found, it is at any rate here that they are most often repeated and most strenuously insisted upon and most daringly thrust upon hearers unwilling to receive them. Christ seems to realise how bitterly hostile these men round Him are, and to accept their hostility as a necessary element in the situation—to think within Himself, "If you will be opponents, at

least you shall have full opportunity of showing how irreconcilable you are"; and so He presses home that claim of His which they could not away with, His claim to be one with God. Even when some of the Jews believed on Him after a fashion, as the thirtieth verse informs us, Christ returns to the same point, as if determined that it shall not be through any imperfect understanding of what He demands for Himself that their belief is rendered; and we see, as the chapter goes on, that under that insistence of Christ's even those who had given Him some sort of assent are roused into opposition again. All through, "the Father" or "my Father" is the word: God was in Him and He in God: He knows God's secrets, reads God's mind: He is not of this world: He is "the Son." Christ's contention was ever this—that He did not have, as others had, to learn about God, to struggle up to Him, to add item after item to His stock of knowledge of God, to grow into a perfect relationship with Him: with God He was from the beginning entirely at home. He had come straight out from the bosom of

the Father whereon He had rested: yea, although the world saw Him as one of its own citizens, He was really resting upon the bosom of the Father still. He was part of God.

We may say, in reference to John's record of this claim of Christ's and of Christ's persistence in affirming and re-affirming it—as we said in reference to the record of Christ's announcement that He was the world's perfect light—that for the evangelist's main purpose it was a thing of value thus to set down the tale of the uncompromising Christ—the Christ who was so sure of Himself. The lowest type of character is always apt to be sure of itself, to think that it has all that can be possessed and is all that it can be—because it is ignorant of how much there is above it: the highest character of all would of course be sure of itself—because the highest must know that there is above it nothing higher still: it is the intermediate types—those to which the most of us belong, those who know themselves to be struggling out of a lowness beneath them into a greatness above them—whose accents will ever

be faltering and who will advance no claims on their own behalf. An assertion that no effort after anything higher remains to be gone through —it might be made by the low man, who has never awakened to the reality of things, and it might be made by divineness itself. Which was Christ? This is the point to be dealt with—so John's recording of Christ's calm, large claim sets it before us—was this Christ so low that He was unaware how far He was from God, and in ignorance made His claim, or was He so high, so divine, that it was with perfect justice He could make it? His assertion about Himself was not one which the average good man could make. One far enough below the average good man to make it, or one far enough above the average good man to make it—which was Christ? And because any claimant asserting unjustly a moral and spiritual oneness with God would be found out ere long, and because Christ was never found to have falsely claimed—because all that He is supports the claim He made—therefore does He stand before us as one with the Father in very deed and truth. Of this chapter—leading as it

does through the great announcement that the world's light was shining up to the great and re-emphasised declarations that God and Christ were one—of this chapter, as of the rest of his Gospel, John could say that these things "are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The greatness of Christ's self-assertion compels us to put Him either down to the lowest or on the very throne of God. Who can hesitate as to where His place shall be?

XIV.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS: "THE GOOD SHEPHERD."

JOHN X. 1–18.

THIS chapter brings us to the last figure, the final metaphor, by which Christ seeks to make clear the relationship which is to subsist between Him and His own. As far back as the fifth chapter, it will be remembered, Christ made the definite statement concerning Himself and His ministry, that "as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself"—indicating thereby that He, the Christ, comes in order to create actual new life out of Himself in the hearts of men. Men are not simply to imitate Him, not simply to believe in Him—in any shallow interpretation of the word "believe"—but to be actually pervaded by

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the life He possesses. And we have followed the subsequent declarations, in which Christ repeated and expounded the same idea under various forms, expressed in differing fashion the fundamental thought that men are in truth to receive Him into themselves and to be themselves lost in Him. For a last method of impressing His persistent idea, Christ employs the figure of the shepherd and his flock, wishing His hearers to understand that as the sheep depend absolutely upon him who tends them for all they do and for all they get, finding all *in* him who tends them, so the followers of Christ stand to Him in a relation of utter dependence, and in Him and from Him are to find their all. To the Eastern mind the metaphor would appeal more powerfully even than to us, since the shepherd of Eastern lands identifies himself most entirely with the sheep under his care, and his interest in them suffers nothing to diminish it, and he makes their safety to be inseparably linked with his own.

Christ the Shepherd—we the sheep of His flock. It is a tender relationship, sweet, idyllic,

beautiful; and I think that after the other figures under which Christ had described His relation to His people and theirs to Him He was glad to use this new figure, which had in it a winsome graciousness absent from the rest. The Creator of life in us, the Bread which is transformed into life in us, the Water which springs up as inexhaustible life in the soul, the Light of life which diffuses itself through us—He is all these things, and must be so apprehended; but these conceptions of Him are so great, with something of austerity in them it may be, making the Christly relation seem to have in it a touch of the severe. And so Christ comes down to us—"here is the same idea of absolute dependence on me in a sweeter form: I am the Good Shepherd. No austerity, but all tenderness, is in that." Having hung these other great ideas before our vision, like suns that dazzle us with their rays if we look upon them too long, Christ swings this quiet star into its place in the sky to shed its softer light. All those great things He is to us and will always be to us; but also He is the Good Shepherd. And yet, if we cast another glance

upon it, we see immediately that, in the using of this metaphor, Christ gives up nothing of His claim to be the one authoritative source of all to us. A shepherd—he is kind and patient and gentle, if he be a shepherd worthy the name; but if he be a shepherd worthy the name, he is also one of the most absolute rulers the world contains. The sheep, I suppose, stands as the type of most utter helplessness, making blunders whenever there is the slightest chance of making them, running into danger as if it loved it, about the most pitifully incapable thing on God's earth. The shepherd, though he rule kindly, must preserve the strictness of his rule. And in Christ's view we are the sheep who do not know their way and have no life except what He, the Shepherd, makes for them. He is the Good Shepherd; and that means that He will be running over with graciousness, compassionate with the wounded and the tired ones; but if He is the Shepherd, we are the sheep, and that means that to take all from Him is the only thing we can safely do. Round again are we brought to the Christ's fundamental idea—that He must

make life for us and in us. So when Christ speaks of Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep, He wants us to combine in our thought about Him these two things—His absolute, authoritative superiority, and His sweet, familiar, condescending care. We have no complete understanding of what Christ would be to us and of what we should be to Him until in our conception of the relationship the two ideas are inseparably linked. When the greatness of the ministry Christ wants to work in us makes us afraid, we may remind ourselves that He does not merely stand above, beyond us, flinging down, as it were, His great ideas, His great suggestions, His great offers, leaving us to get out of Him what we can, but is the Shepherd who compasses His flock about with active benevolence and care. When, on the other hand, the wonder of His tenderness warms and gladdens us, we are to remember still that all those great ideas and great suggestions and great offers of His keep their authority unimpaired; and, let the Shepherd be kind as He will, the sheep on their side must at least obey. Christ's metaphor, when He speaks of Himself as the

leader of the flock, suggests alike and equally His undiminished authority over us as the source of all our life, and His gracious, familiar condescension in bringing life to those who in themselves have none. And we must allow both suggestions to have their weight if we would fully apprehend the figure Christ employs.

It may be said that Christ's divine greatness shows itself in this—that He can bear to stoop, that He can use language like this, so gentle as it is, so unduly mild as it would be in any other who should aspire to be a leader of men, and yet keep all His majesty. Your ordinary man who wants to hold a position of authority and leadership is everlastingly afraid lest he should unbend too far: he has to keep his distance and to keep others at theirs: he must allow no soft accents to slide into his speech: he compromises himself so far as he makes familiar relations possible between himself and those whom he seeks to lead. But this Christ has so much greatness in reserve that, let Him stoop as He may, men still feel that His home is in heaven. Somehow all the

tenderness of His language and the grace of His attitude to men does but suggest and emphasise the measureless divineness behind it all, which never can be veiled. Truly this man, who could thus make Himself familiar to men as the Shepherd whose sheep they were, and could yet without any incongruity claim an absolute rule—truly this was the Son of God!

The figure suggests the constancy of man's dependence upon Christ, its persistence, its permanence. The sheep are never educated to a point at which they can do without the sheperd's care. Our attachment to Christ is not simply a new beginning for us, a means by which we obtain a fresh start. As dependent as we are to-day, so dependent must we always remain: in this matter of the true life there is no strengthening of faculty which will at last enable us to do without shepherding and accomplish everything for ourselves: Christ does not take us in charge in order that He may train us to stand alone. There are certain directions in which we are not to look for progress: the only progress for which

we are to look is progress in the power of obtaining more from Christ, in letting His shepherding of us have more complete effect. Christ is not the schoolmaster in matters of the spiritual life, keeping us under His hands for a while, and then sending us forth with our education finished to act out the principles He has instilled. He is the Shepherd whose work of care is never done. To enter, not upon independence, but upon a completer and more continuous dependence, is the only progress that has worth. The perfected life is not the life grown so strong that it needs no shelter any more, but the life which never quits the Shepherd's fold.

The metaphor offers also a suggestion, which for every soul has sweetness, as to the separate, individual character of Christ's ministries. "He calleth his own sheep by name"—as the Eastern shepherd does know his sheep, distinguishing them every one, remembering the particular characteristics and necessities of each. So does Christ know His sheep separately, as it were by name. The Creator of life, the Bread of life, the

Water of life, the Light of life—yes, but there is something impersonal about all these things: I may try to know something about them, but they will not know anything about me. Then take the final figure. The Shepherd knows. Christ is all these things, but He sets them before us with remembrance of and regard for the particular elements of your life and mine which belong to us alone. A Christ who can only work on men and save men in one way, and yet a Christ who works on and saves each man in the way adapted to his own special need—so does the sweet contradiction run! And let me be what I may, Christ, wanting to give Himself to me, to shepherd me, will make His approach to me in a way that I shall understand; and He will take this sheep of His in His arms in a different fashion from that other, and His voice to each one will be the voice to which each one will most readily respond. By many varieties of ministry will this Shepherd bring all His sheep at last to receive His one great ministry of eternal life.

So, not forgetting the other methods in which

Christ had declared Himself, did John wish His readers to add to them this last and tenderest declaration, that they might be the more surely won. As they heard Him calling Himself the Good Shepherd, they were to accept Him so—making in answer to His words their own psalm of confidence and praise, testifying that the Lord was their Shepherd indeed, and that therefore they could not want.

XV.

CHRIST SEEN UNDER THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

JOHN xi., xii.

IN order to preserve unity of impression, our study has to abstract itself from many of the details contained in the subsequent chapters of John's Gospel, and to concentrate upon the spirit behind the recorded deeds and utterances of Christ rather than upon the deeds and utterances themselves. John lingers lovingly over much whereon we, lest the general effect be blurred by prominence of particulars, must not linger long. Full as the remaining chapters are of much which will ever be most precious to the Christian mind and heart, for our present purpose —which is to gather the one impression whereto every detail is subordinate — they must be

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surveyed with swift, rather than with slow-moving, eyes.

The end of the tenth chapter marks a clear break in John's narrative; and he resumes now the method of writing which after the fourth chapter he laid down. Let us recall for an instant what the run of the story has been—always, of course, bearing in mind that John's main object in compiling his Gospel has been to build up a cumulative witness that this Jesus is in truth the Son of God. John began by recounting various incidents *about* Christ—the calling of the first disciples, the miracle at Cana of Galilee, the conversation with Nicodemus, and others—each incident in its turn doing a little more to separate Christ from the family of mere men, and bringing into bolder relief something in Him for which ordinary classifications provided no place. After the fourth chapter, John did not so much speak about Christ as allow Christ to speak for Himself: the marvellous consciousness of Christ, His own inner life, His own thought and feeling, have been expressing themselves from the time the fifth

chapter commenced until now; and it has not been John pointing us to the divineness Christ manifested, but the divineness in Christ coming forth to draw our attention upon itself. In all these discourses of His about life and bread and light and water and shepherding, there has been the implied question, "What save divineness could utter itself like this?" Now John begins to speak *about* Christ once more; and it is about what a human estimate would term the sad ending of His life that John is preparing to speak; and it is to the account of the last scenes that these chapters—the eleventh and twelfth—are designed to lead up. "You said at the beginning," John's readers might remark, "that this Christ came unto His own and that His own received Him not. If He were in truth of God, He ought to have been able to avert the doom brought upon Him by the rejection of those that were His own. How are you going to deal with that matter? You have been building up an impression of divine greatness in this Jesus—will it survive the story of His death?" And so John faces the question. He will recount the tale of

the last scenes, without fear that they who read it open-mindedly will fancy the chief Figure in them to be suffering any loss of greatness as the scenes pass before their eyes, knowing rather that those last scenes themselves will but accentuate His greatness still more. Only something must be set before the readers by way of preliminary, and they must understand that, although Christ permitted death to master Him, He really held the mastery over death, and that He chose death because by death He perfected the work He had begun.

The eleventh chapter shows Christ mastering death, in that He called back the dead Lazarus from the tomb: Christ Himself, therefore, need not have died. The twelfth chapter shows Christ actually welcoming death, and giving the reason for His welcoming of it—"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." And we miss a great deal of what John intended to convey unless we realise how the contents of these chapters, in addition to the interest and suggestion they possess in themselves, fit thus into the evangelist's general scheme. He is going

to recount how Christ, divine though He was, died under the hands of men; and he prepares his readers for the recounting of it by showing how in His divineness Christ was able to master death when He would, and yet how in His divineness He actually welcomed it as it threateningly lifted up its head.

That there dwelt in Him the divineness, the divine creative power, the divine life, against which death was powerless, He showed when He came to the cave where Lazarus lay buried, and called in a voice which the dead was constrained to obey, "Lazarus, come forth." If He could do this, then all questioning of His divineness based on the fact that He endured the Cross becomes invalid: it can no more be said that death conquered Him, but only that He, when He might have done otherwise, submitted Himself to death; and it must be true, as He had asserted before, that no man taketh His life from Him, but that He layeth it down of Himself because this is the commandment He has received from His Father. The conqueror's power was His,

had He chosen to put it forth. At once, therefore (so the inference irresistibly suggests itself), He is carried away from the level of all others who for the sake of great causes have died: He was not, as others have been, a martyr who, with all power and opportunity of resistance exhausted, accepted a fate from which there was no escape: the door was open to Him up to the end, had He willed to flee. And so He grows divinely great indeed. Can it be thought that any, even among the noblest heroes of our race, would, if they had been possessed of such power as this—and a power, moreover, by the exercise of which they could have covered themselves with renown and brought at any rate a temporary success to their cherished cause—have held it back? To endure what must be endured is one thing: to submit to what may without loss of honour in man's eyes be avoided is quite another. But Christ, who Himself called the dead to life, said no word to bid death hold aloof when it drew near. Carry that remembrance with you, John would say, as you read the story of the Cross, and, notwithstanding the Cross, you will be sure

that He who died upon it was the Son of God.

But John wants his readers to see, not only Christ submitting to death when He might have been free, but Christ actually welcoming it, rejoicing in it is not too strong a word, taking it as being even a help to His influence upon the hearts of men. And so, in the twelfth chapter, he tells how certain Greeks, drawn to seek for Christ by something they had heard concerning Him, were among the worshippers at the feast. In one sense it was an opportunity: here was recognition accorded to Christ from beyond, however His own might refuse to receive Him: these few He had drawn by the magnetism of whatever was strange and wonderful in Him. But He would not be carried away, would find no excuse in this success for avoiding what lay before Him. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." He had drawn but these few: His Cross would draw, not a few, but all. To Christ, death, His submission to death, was going to be, not a curtailing, but an

enlargement, of His influence and His work. Carry with you—so John would say to those who read his words—carry with you, as you ponder the story of the Cross, the remembrance that this Christ welcomed it, rejoiced in it, prophesied that it would be itself the very strength by which He would win His way; and notwithstanding the Cross, you will be sure that He who died upon it was the Son of God.

There is a strengthening of the impression made upon us by Christ's welcome of death in remembering how the fact that He so welcomed it chimes in and harmonises with all that He has previously said about the relationship between Himself and man. That through His dying that relationship would become a possible experience for all men through all time, was an idea at which He had already hinted, however little the hint may have been understood. When He spoke of Himself as the bread of life—indicating thereby that absolute union between Himself and man was the conception of the needed relationship He entertained—thoughts of the approaching death were moving in His

mind; and it was through sacrifice that He would become the bread of life to all. With gaze fixed upon the decease He was to accomplish, He said then, "Yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." For the full understanding of it, that utterance must be linked with the other utterance following a little further on. "The bread which I will give is my flesh," —and yet it is not long before Christ goes on, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Christ looked upon the giving of His body up to death as the means whereby His spirit, the quickening bread of our spirits, would be set free to offer itself far and wide to men: through His sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross, and through His rising when the Cross had done its worst (for death and resurrection were always inseparably linked in His thought), He would become and would remain, in the continued, unseen ministry which was to begin when the seen and earthly ministry closed, the bread of life, not to a few, but to all the world. It was a figure within a figure, a metaphor within a metaphor. Christ was the bread for souls, and

the bread which He would give was His flesh, since the giving of Himself to death would mark the beginning of that spirit-ministry of His, unchanged and real till now, which is the quickening influence for the life of the world. The Cross was standing in Christ's thought, not as the end, but as the beginning of things; and sacrifice would but enlarge His power of offering Himself to men as their spiritual food.

Here the same fundamental idea possesses Him; and it is as we remember how Christ viewed the relationship between Himself and man that we become able to enter in measure into His thought of what may—though with recognition of the inadequacy of the phrase—be called the advantage of the Cross. He saw in the Cross the means which would make Him for ever accessible to man, able to be the source of life to those who would unite themselves with Him. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." The utterance is itself profound, and corresponds with all the other profound things which in this profoundest of all the Gospels Christ is reported to have said about Himself.

"*Will draw all men unto myself*"—that is, will so take men who are willing to surrender into the deeps of My own life and so identify them with Myself and Myself with them that all their life shall be drawn from Mine. Since He was going to do that—since He was going to carry on that enfolding of man's spirit within His own through all the coming centuries of the world—Christ looked on to the Cross and to the resurrection whereof the Cross was the prelude (for let it be said again that death and rising always made one whole in Christ's mind) as giving the needed demonstration that in Him was life and that He would ceaselessly have life to give. If He died and rose again, He would be the living and the life-giving Christ for evermore: the very Cross which seemed to slay Him would itself supply the proof that death had no dominion over Him; and men might let themselves, till time was done, be drawn to the Christ who had life in Himself and life to give. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." "That winning of all men into oneness with Me, which is the work the Father has given Me to do, will be

performed year on year unfailingly when it is by One who died and lives again that men are sought and drawn."

Preacher of new and most wondrous truth, exemplar of most perfect character, even supreme revelation of God in a manner—all these Christ could have been without the Cross. We could have looked back nineteen, twenty, any number of centuries, to recover all that, to hear the echoes of His words, to discern the outline of what He was. But we could not look back nineteen, twenty centuries for life. To be the life-giver, the one who constantly draws men unto, into Himself—for that there must be something more, if we may so say, than a local Christ; and for that great ministry Christ's Cross and His rising set Him free. Since He died and rose, the life in Him can draw me to-day and can to-day, through that union, be mine. This did Christ see in the Cross on which He was to die—and seeing this, welcomed the Cross with all its pain —the beginning of that ministry whereby into His own triumphant life He would draw the souls of men, poor of life as they might be, to

the end of time. The very Cross would speak to men of the life-giver who had conquered the Cross, and would give them for their worship and their trust, not a Christ who had been and passed away, but a Christ who, though He was dead, was alive for evermore.

It is not suggested that this touches more than the fringe of Calvary's meaning, or that Christ read in His Cross no other significance than that here drawn out. But, at Christ's side, we read these things at least with Him upon the mysterious page which tells how He was to drink death's bitter cup. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." By the Cross He was going to win that power which He uses still. Of all others who in the service of humanity have given their lives one can say that, had they been permitted to keep them, their service to humanity would have been greater still: of Christ one has to say that just because He died does His empire grow on and on towards universality among men.

But this thought of Christ's had a divine daring

in it. Only divineness could entertain such an expectation as this of His. What made Christ so humbly submit and so wondrously rejoice in that whereto He submitted? Is there any sufficient explanation but this—that this was the Son of God?

XVI.

CHRIST SEEN AS CONCEALING AND REVEALING HIMSELF: THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

JOHN xiii.

HAVING furnished his readers, in the narrative of the two preceding chapters, with two fundamental ideas which they are to carry with them through their glance over the closing scenes, John now begins his account of the closing scenes themselves. Christ had power over death, for He had bidden the dead Lazarus live; and His death was therefore no martyrdom in the ordinary sense, no fate which He was unable to escape, but a fate voluntarily embraced—that is one thing to be remembered as the story goes on. And death was something which Christ took as an actual assistance to His ministry, not

as a hindrance to it, for by means of it He would gather power to draw all men unto Himself—that is the other. Now John proceeds to show still more clearly how absolutely out of the common order is Christ's bearing of Himself throughout, how in all He did and in all He said there is something only to be explained by declaring that there was in Him a life entirely different from the life of man. Even if it were possible to imagine one of the ordinary family of mankind in such a position as this of Christ's —with a death before him which might be escaped, with a death before him, moreover, which was going to perfect his work—his action and his speaking would be of a different order, directed along quite different lines, from the action and the speaking of Christ. These chapters are to show how the promptings which moved Christ are quite other than the promptings by which, if one could picture a man set in Christ's position and possessed of Christ's power, a man would be moved. This present chapter shows it in regard to what Christ did, as the following chapters show it in regard to what Christ said.

He humbles Himself before His most intimate followers, making no attempt to impress even them with any special sense of the power He was restraining or of the greatness He kept veiled. The greatest of men, accepting as they may whatever may be involved in faithfulness to their call, find strength in communicating the inmost secrets of their minds to those who are in truth their friends. Of course history has many instances of great ones who have preserved locked within their own breasts thoughts and feelings which could not have been understood had they uttered them; and there have been those who, because any telling of what was in them would have been a vain thing, have kept silence. But before those who are accessible to impression, man opens his heart: in the company of his intimates, who are willing to hear and who will appreciate whatever seems to indicate his greatness, man's lips are unsealed. This Christ, accepting a death He need not endure, keeping restraint upon a power in Him by whose exercise He might be delivered—what will He do? Will He not at least ensure that upon the

minds of these disciples, gathered with Him just before the end, an adequate impression shall be left of the greatness with which He might have dazzled the world? They would be ready to listen to Him if He spoke of it, would gladly cherish the recollection of any sign of it He might give—will He not see to it that the impression they are ready to receive is given? *They*, at least, will surely be made to know how wonderful their Master is?

But instead of greatening Himself in their eyes, the Christ brings Himself low, and washes His disciples' feet. He cares nothing about what impression His followers may have as to His power to resist the advancing doom: He cares a great deal more about the spirit that may dwell in them after His departure; and in order that the spirit dwelling in them may be right, He gives them this example that they should do as He is doing to them. It is in that direction that Christ's thought is looking: having no desire that this renunciation of power He is making in letting death conquer Him should be impressed as a wonderful thing upon the disciples' minds, He

does not set their attention upon that: among their last recollections of Him there is to stand out the recollection of Him as He humbled Himself to this, so showing them what they themselves should be. Quite away from all ordinary human methods is Christ lifted in this, as in so many other things we have seen Him to be. When man would have striven that at least the intimate ones in his fellowship should appreciate and understand, Christ cares, not for their understanding of Him, but for their continuance in a right spirit after He is gone. The greatness He is veiling is a secret between Himself and God—not even to these friendly eyes is it to be displayed.

But was the Christ, then, wholly removed from what man would have felt at such a time? If He was, His very distance from the common plane of humanity might come to appear too great. The sympathies for which man would have yearned, the helpfulness which hearts near by can render to a heart which has to endure—was all this nothing to Christ? Nay, for "he was troubled in the spirit, and testified, and said,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." It was pain to Him, and a trouble to His spirit, that among His followers should be one so base; and His sorrow over it He does not hide. Quite away, once more, from the ordinary methods of men. What man would have displayed—the greatness in Him—Christ hides: what man would have hidden—the pain caused by the unworthiness of one of the band—Christ displays. Your great man would be afraid that such a reference as this would be taken as a sign of weakness, of failing heart, of relaxed will: Christ takes the risk, and lets those with Him see that the falling away of one makes Him to be troubled and cast down. So John adds stroke after stroke to his picture—shows Christ hiding what man would have revealed—then shows Christ revealing what man would have hidden—and drives one thus nearer and nearer to the conclusion that in this Christ there was a life at work, prompting Him to this incalculable unexpectedness of action, which must have been a life different from the life of man. He had no care to make detailed impression of His

greatness even upon His most intimate ones: yet their sympathy meant something to Him; and when the sympathy of any one of them was withheld, He did not hide His grief.

Yet, to complete the picture, John sets in one other stroke. Christ might be troubled in spirit at the knowledge of the treachery with which Judas was going to defile his soul; but the trouble meant no real weakening of life to Him. For at the moment when the traitor goes forth to do his treacherous work, Christ rises above all emotion of trouble and regret, and, falling back once more upon the promptings of the life within, declares with victorious joy, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." So, although Christ was glad for all the sympathy and love His disciples would yield, He had elsewhere a sufficient store of strength: He does not make Himself really dependent upon them, even though He will receive what they give; and in the depths of Him there is that which upholds Him and imparts this ring of triumph to His tone even as the traitor goes

out to betray Him, and as the rest, under the mysteriousness of the whole thing, are dumb. It is not dependence upon those around, for they are yielding no support: it is not stoicism, for Christ is troubled because sympathy and faithfulness fail: what can make or account for the joy, then, but another life in Him fed from divine sources, a life man has not known? Not like man in what He hides—not like man in what He reveals—not like man in the joy which rises within His heart at the very moment when man could do no more than endure, if indeed man could do even that—so, point by point, John intensifies our conviction that here is One before us who is not of us, who came from God.

One wonders what those who saw the Christ, as He moved through these phases of His activity before them, gathered from what they saw. As to the most of it, what He did they knew not then. We, at any rate, looking back, can get but one impression—an ever-deepening impression of greatness, of immeasurable divineness, of the presence of another life, only to be

called the life of God, in this Christ on whom we look. And for the establishing of our faith in Him, there is something to be gained in looking upon Him as He goes through these last scenes which, had He been less than divine, would surely have shown Him to be so, but through which He passes with such an inspiration of sacred life possessing Him as no other has ever known. In imagination, set the noblest man into the situation of Christ as the end drew near, and you will be surer than ever that the Christ is born out of diviner forces than those which make the common family of man, and descends from God.

XVII.

CHRIST SEEN IN THE UPPER ROOM.

JOHN xiv.–xvii.

ONE of the chief marvels in these four marvellous chapters—from the beginning of the fourteenth to the close of the seventeenth—is that throughout the stretch of them Jesus lays the whole stress of what He says upon His disciples rather than upon Himself. Of the four chapters, the first three record Christ's utterances to His companions in the upper room, while the fourth contains His prayer to God; but everywhere the atmosphere is the same. When He speaks, His speaking is concerned, not with any consideration as to how what He is about to go through will affect Him, but with the effect it will have upon those whom He has

loved and loves; and when He prays, it is still with them and with their concerns that His prayer is occupied. It is to cheer them that He speaks: it is that they may be cheered and kept that He prays.

Every verse is in itself a jewel that scintillates with light, a wonder over which the rapt attention cannot help being detained; and every separate thing that Christ said has left to the Christian mind a legacy of rich thought and suggestion inexhaustible through all the years. But just now, in this rapid survey of ours, I want, not to linger over any particular saying, but to notice the marvel which looks forth through all the sayings alike; for so will the purpose of securing a unified impression from the entire course of John's Gospel best be served. And the constant marvel here is that Christ, with the Cross so close upon Him that its shadow must have been already felt upon His soul, devotes Himself, not to thinking about what will mitigate His own pain or gird His own strength, but to the comforting of those from whose sight He was about to pass. "Let not

your heart be troubled," so His communication to the disciples begins: "these things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," so His communication to the disciples ends. And between the beginning and the ending the same spirit persists; and throughout the prayer which we are permitted to overhear the same spirit is revealed. How to them the Comforter would be sent, although from them He Himself in His visible presence would be withdrawn—how they would not be left desolate, however things might seem—how He was going to leave peace with them—how they might have whatever they asked in His name — how their sorrow would be turned into joy—with what a long-drawn list of promised blessings does He seek to make their oppressed hearts grow light again! How does the picture of such self-effacement as this impress you?—John seems to enquire. To us, of course, there is no surprise in it, for it is what we should expect from one higher and diviner than ourselves; but for John's purpose—

the purpose of leading his readers to see that here *is* one higher and diviner than themselves—how the picture would tell, as stroke by stroke and line by line he paints it! This Christ, set at what a man, great as he might be, would have looked upon as the crisis of his fate, when he would have had no thought to spare for anything except for what would help him to face the crisis unflinchingly and to pass through it unbelittled and unashamed—this Christ devotes Himself to binding up His disciples' wounded hearts! What reserves of life—reserves which no mere human life could ever have accumulated—what reserves of life there must have been in Him! In a sense, Christ took His impending fate to be more His disciples' concern than His own: He appears to watch it as though from outside and to note, not what it brings to Him, but what it thrusts upon them; and while others would have been occupied in suppressing the natural shudder of apprehension and in girding themselves up to maintain a brave front, He turns quietly to those near by, with the word, "Let not *your* heart be troubled."

It is good for us sometimes thus to take into account the general bearing of the Christ rather than His detailed actions and words, for so there gathers round about Him a greatness vaster even than actions or words, taken alone, produce. Wonderful are many of the things He did, wonderful many of the things He said; but when, passing behind the actual sayings and doings, we get a grip upon the spirit and feeling out of which they come, there descends upon us an impression of divineness in the Christ which overmasters all resistance. It may be said, in fact, that the supreme proof of Christ's divineness lies not in anything He said or did, or in any logical inference drawn from what He said or did: one can construct reasoned proofs, of course, and they have their worth; but in the last resort, it is the atmosphere which hangs round about Him, the indefinable spirit behind all the miracle and all the preaching, that proclaim themselves from heaven. One feels it as one feels the breath of changed and purer air. This spirit, one knows, as one gazes upon it, is coming

down *to* earth, not being produced *from* earth. In regard to many things Christ said, imagine, if you can, a man wise enough to say them—still you would not have a Christ; or in regard to many things Christ did, imagine, if you can, a man strong enough to do them, still you would not have a Christ: there is something more, something behind, in the general constitution of the life and being, which separates Him from all. And these chapters show a fresh instance in point. This absence from the Christ of any interest—for so it may be phrased—in what lay before Him, this detachment of His from any care about it for His own sake, this concentration of Himself upon others through the hours of crisis, which marks His whole bearing—one realises that it is all flung out from behind the gates of heaven. Earth never made it: no forces at work in human nature are sufficient for this: to this marvel of temperament (though the term is of course inadequate) nothing else than divineness can have given birth.

For the substance and burden of the message

with which Christ sought to console His disciples for His impending departure from their side, it is a reaffirmation of His assurance that death was not the end, but the beginning, of His perfect ministry. Spite of the appearance of departure, He will be with His own still—not as a memory, not as one who has paid a visit to their lives and communicated a new impulse to them thereby—but He will be with them as a living presence, still able to do for them all that He has been doing and more than He has been doing, able to repeat and to enlarge all His ministries to them, even although the channels of their coming should be changed. He would not leave them desolate, but would come unto them. He, with the Father, would make His abode with them. He was the vine and they were the branches, and they were to abide in Him. The world might behold Him no more, but they would behold Him, and because He lived they should live also. He would see them again, and their heart should rejoice, and their joy no one should take from them. And so, in various

ways, through many forms of speech, Christ seeks to bring His disciples to an apprehension of the truth that, after He was gone, no less than while He was in bodily presence near them, He would be to them the very source of life. As He had on previous occasions declared Himself, to those who could not or would not understand, to be life's bread, life's light, the living water—possessing the source of life in Himself—so now He impresses upon the disciples, longing that they may understand, that independent of physical presence or absence, He will have in Himself for them life's inexhaustible supply. And understanding and remembering that, they would leap past the Cross with all its sadness, knowing, as Christ knew, that it was not the close of a ministry, but the beginning of a ministry that should endure; and their hearts would be troubled no more.

The secret of a strong Christian life is to be learnt in that upper room; for its secret is the conviction that Christ is still what He ever was. He did not merely make history, as

other great ones have made history: He did not inaugurate a new era, and then leave, to work themselves out, the new forces He brought into play. If He only did that, our hearts might be troubled indeed at the thought that His footsteps tread our earth no more. The very greatness of the ideals He uplifted before us, the very fact that no other can compare with Him, would but make the present desolation a desolation indeed if He only came and went away. And when so much modern thinking is devoted to a reconstruction of the earthly life of Christ, when so many lights are flashed upon it that it starts out into dazzling clearness, a work is done for us whereof we may indeed be glad, but a work with whose doing we may not rest content. The greatness of what was is only an oppression unless we are alive to the greatness of what is now. It was to what was coming after that Christ's earthly life looked on: it is on what *is* come after that our gaze must be fixed. Now He is what He was and more than He was: now we are to abide, not in the memory of Him, but in Him:

He did not simply come and go and leave a fragrance upon our earth, but He makes His abode with us; and, commonplace as all these things are, it is as we remember them and re-impress them upon our hearts and appreciate the vivid reality of them that our discipleship is delivered from aught of sadness and strain and becomes a buoyant thing. For our consolation, as for the consolation of those who companied with Him in the upper room, Christ tells us that, though our eyes see Him not, yet He is coming now to receive us unto Himself, that desolate He does not leave us, that now and to the end He is for us the living source of life. And so we need not let our hearts be troubled, since from us no one can take the living Christ who is Himself our joy.

XVIII.

CHRIST SEEN AT THE END AND AT THE NEW BEGINNING.

JOHN xviii.–xxi.

THROUGH the chapters with which his Gospel closes John has only to indicate how right up to the end Christ remains what all the preceding narrative has shown Him to be, so that the whole account may reach its termination without revealing any trace of inconsistency in His bearing or His words. The last tests—whether it be the test of apparent failure under the suffering of the Cross, or the test of triumph when resurrection had come—the last tests are endured by Christ without any impairing of the impression He gives as living from other sources than those whence man's life is drawn. The picture forms one

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harmonious whole: we may go to the account of this life and death, and if, impressed by the wonder of the life and death, we ask what the explanation can be, the only adequate reply is that this Christ is from above; or we may begin, as it were, at the other end and may enquire whether, on the supposition that this Christ is from above, there is in the account any single thing which does not fit in with the theory we bring—only to find that there is not one. It is not merely that on the whole, taking everything into consideration, Christ was probably divine. Who can it be that has said these things and done these things and been these things? The Son of God. And if the Son of God did come to earth—if such a coming could be—what would the Son of God naturally say and do and be? Just these things. There are many great things in this life which can only be explained by saying that this is the Son of God; and there is nothing in this life which is not great enough to be so explained. The saying that Christ was from above covers all the life: the

life was always up to the demands of the saying. And John completes his story in order that his readers may see how this is so. The end matches the beginning. The last scenes fit perfectly upon those that have gone before.

Through the whole tragedy of the Crucifixion something shows itself in this Sufferer which marks Him out from all other sufferers of whom history tells. One has but to ask oneself a single question in order to see the truth of the statement. What is the emotion stirred in the human soul as detail is piled on detail while the story of the Passion passes on? Can we pity Christ? That is the emotion we should feel were it anybody else's fate of which we read; but pity, in the ordinary sense, has no place here. Any pity of ours appears almost an impertinence when offered to this Sufferer. Not that to Christ pain was any less real than to others—not that to Him, through His divineness, one touch was spared of the bitterness such a death as that must have held;

but it is awe, not pity, that moves us as we behold Him drinking the cup of bitterness to its last drop: He is not open to sympathy of ours, we instinctively feel: our hearts are overwhelmed before this Cross because it is so holy, not because it is so sad. One dares not pity Christ. Something dwells in Him, looking forth upon us, which even in those awful hours, when in one sense He comes nearest to our suffering humanity, takes Him right away from ordinary suffering humanity again — no open-minded reader can go through John's chapters without being conscious of the fact. Here at the life's close is the same quality which all the life's progress has shown—that remoteness, that severance, from man's common plane. And (if we may venture upon the question) did we ask, How would a Son of God take a death inflicted upon Him by the hands of men?—we should have to answer, He would have taken it thus. The whole thing fits in.

Then John passes to the resurrection. "The

light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness overcame it not"—so he had said at the Gospel's beginning. Now he has to tell how, notwithstanding the temporary overclouding, the light emerged in brilliance again. And still the whole thing fits in. This Christ whose whole life had been a revelation of heavenly life, ought, if all He said about Himself was true and if those who received impressions of something heavenly from Him were not deluded, to find nothing in death He cannot overcome. The divine life that held Him—if it did really hold Him—ought to be able to hold Him still, whatever man might do. There is nothing miraculous about the resurrection for those who have set themselves under the impression of the life that went before: it is what one would expect, if it had really been given to Christ, as He declared it to have been given to Him and as one cannot help believing it to have been given to Him—if it had really been given to Christ to have life in Himself: the miracle would have been for a resurrection not to come. And yet it is to be noticed that, although the resurrection was His vindication, Jesus did not use it so

in face of an unbelieving world: it was to His disciples that He showed Himself, not to those who during His life had scorned Him; and He would not now, any more than He would before, employ the power of the divine life in Him merely to provoke wonder or to excite an admiration that had no moral quality or value. Again, the whole thing fits in. The picture makes an unbroken harmony throughout. It is thus, we are moved to declare, that the Son of God would have borne Himself. It is thus that a divine life would have manifested its divineness.

With the resurrection and the self-manifestation of Christ to His disciples John had intended, probably, to bring his Gospel to a close. At any rate the verses at the end of the twentieth chapter read like last words. But then, as if suddenly recollecting something, John adds the chapter which follows. I fancy that as his mind travelled back from the end of his task to the scenes he had recorded at the beginning, John remembered how, at Peter's calling, Jesus

had told him that he should be called Cephas—a rock or stone, indicating that his nature should be transformed from its instability and unruled impulse to rock-like firmness and strength. And the last thing John has had to record about Peter has been the fact that he denied his Lord. Was Christ's promise then to come to nought? Not so. And to show how Jesus still meant this impulsive Peter to be transformed, John records the tender scene in which Christ, without reproach or hardness, recommences His spiritual training of the disciple who had failed, draws from him his avowal—"Lord, thou knowest that I love thee"—and bids him feed His sheep. Still it fits in. The Christ who at the beginning was conscious of the power to transform character and make a man the exact contrary of what he was before, is at the end conscious of it still, and actually begins the transforming work when Peter must have felt himself almost beyond any redeeming power at all. Just what the Son of God would do—our hearts dare humbly to voice their assent. The wholeness of the picture is made more vivid to us still by the

chapter which John adds after he had thought his task was done.

So the profoundest book in all the world reaches its climax and its close. This is the book which speaks of Life—of man's need of it, of the gift of it in Jesus Christ. There is no book in the Bible—and of course, therefore, no book in all the libraries of earth—that can so give us a fused impression of strong, beating, palpitating life as this Fourth Gospel, which we have rapidly scanned, and no book that can so make us realise that life, life in its fullest sense, may be ours. And life is in truth our need. To have had a great example is something, but not all. To have had even a Saviour who, by something He did outside us, made possible to us a passage to heaven, is not enough for those whose souls are really wakened. It is life we need. We feel, when the slumbering instincts are roused, and the commonplace quietude which broods generally over our inner being is broken up—we feel then as if the life within us were flowing, a poor, thin, trickling stream, between its banks,

instead of rushing on like a rich, flooding torrent that gathers strength and volume as it goes: looking round the length and breadth and height of our natures, we see vast empty spaces, silent and desolate, waiting for a movement and a beauty that have not come; or, to change the figure, our souls are like a great house with half its rooms unfurnished, striking consciousness of poverty and helplessness upon us as we see how bare they are. Existence, of course, is always ours, but life, in any large and rounded sense of the word, is not. We only pant along our way, instead of drawing full, deep breaths. We want life. What we want is some ministry which will change our lives within us to divine fulness, which will work, not only *for* us, but *in* us, which will convert the merely human in us into something that is of God. We want divine life to overflow us as the sea-tides overflow the bare sands which at the ebb lie waiting for the tides to come. And in the Christ as John shows Him the life-tide of God begins its flow upon our bare and desolate hearts. Let us take that impression of Christ from our study of His deep conscious-

ness in this book—realise how, when our voices make their pleading—

> 'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
> Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want

—this Christ has life indeed, and in His power of self-communication to us can make us to have life and to have it abundantly. And through these things that once were written by the evangelist of vanished centuries may something of their intended work be wrought in us who read the phrases formed by his dead hand — we believing with more complete assurance that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and, as we believe, finding life in His name.

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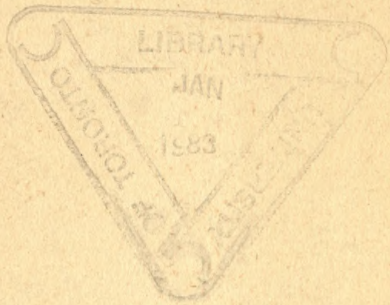
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